THE FIRST VIOLIN.



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THE FIRST VIOLIN.

A Novel.

"Entbehren ſollſt du: ſollſt entbehren!"

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. III.

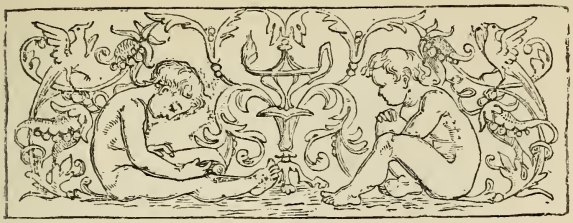


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THE FIRST VIOLIN.

BOOK V.—*Continued.*

VÆ VICTIS!

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRUTH.

AS days went on and grew into weeks, and weeks paired off until a month passed, and I still saw the same stricken look upon my sister's face, my heart grew full of foreboding.

One morning the astonishing news came that Sir Peter had gone to America.

"America!" I ejaculated (it was always I who acted the part of chorus and did the exclamations and questioning), and I looked at Harry Arkwright, who had communicated the news, and who held an open letter in his hand.

"Yes, to America, to see about a railway which looks very bad. He has no end of their Bonds," said Harry, folding up the letter.

"When will he return?"

"He doesn't know. Meanwhile we are to stay where we are."

Adelaide, when we spoke of this circumstance, said bitterly:

"Everything is against me!"

"Against you, Adelaide?" said I, looking apprehensively at her.

"Yes, everything!" she repeated.

She had never been very effusive in her behaviour to others; she was now, if possible, still less so, but the uniform quietness and gentleness with which she now treated all who came in contact with her, puzzled and troubled me. *What* was it that preyed upon

her mind? In looking round for a cause my thoughts lighted first on one person, then on another: I dismissed the idea of all, except Von Francius, with a smile. Shortly I abandoned that idea too. True, he was a man of very different calibre from the others; a man, too, for whom Adelaide had conceived a decided friendship, though in these latter days even that seemed to be dying out. He did not come so often; when he did come they had little to say to each other. Perhaps, after all, the cause of her sad looks lay no deeper than her everyday life, which must necessarily grow more mournful day by day. She could feel intensely, as I had lately become aware, and had, too, a warm, quick imagination. It might be that a simple weariness of life and the anticipation of long years to come of such a life lay so heavily upon her soul as to have wrought that gradual change.

Sometimes I was satisfied with this theory; at others it dwindled into a miserably inadequate measure. When Adelaide once or twice kissed me, smiled at me, and called me

"dear," it was on my lips to ask the meaning of the whole thing, but it never passed them. I dared not speak when it came to the point.

One day, about this time, I met Anna Sartorius in one of the picture exhibitions. I would have bowed and passed her, but she stopped and spoke to me.

"I have not seen you often lately," said she; "but I assure you, you will hear more of me sometime—and before long."

Without replying, I passed on. Anna had ceased even to pretend to look friendly upon me, and I did not feel much alarm as to her power for or against my happiness or peace of mind.

Regularly, once a month, I wrote to Miss Hallam, and occasionally had a few lines from Stella, who had become a protégée of Miss Hallam's too. They appeared to get on very well together, at which I did not wonder; for Stella, with all her youthfulness, was of a cynical turn of mind, which must suit Miss Hallam well.

My greatest friend in Elberthal was good

little Doctor Mittendorf, who had brought his wife to call upon me, and to whose house I had been invited several times since Miss Hallam's departure.

During this time I worked more steadily than ever, and with a deeper love of my art for itself. Von Francius was still my master and my friend. I used to look back upon the days, now nearly a year ago, when I first saw him, and seeing him, distrusted and only half-liked him, and wondered at myself; for I had now as entire a confidence in him as can by any means be placed in a man. He had thoroughly won my esteem, respect, admiration—in a measure, too, my affection. I liked the power of him; the strong hand with which he carried things in his own way; the idiomatic language, and quick, curt sentences in which he enunciated his opinions. I felt him like a strong, kind, and thoughtful elder brother, and have had abundant evidence in his deeds and in some brief, unemotional words of his that he felt a great regard of the fraternal kind for me. It has often comforted me, that friendship — pure, disin-

terested and manly on his side, grateful and unwavering on mine.

I still retained my old lodgings in the Wehrhahn, and was determined to do so. I would not be tied to remain in Sir Peter Le Marchant's house unless I chose. Adelaide wished me to come and remain with her altogether. She said Sir Peter wished it too; he had written and said she might ask me. I asked what was Sir Peter's motive in wishing it? Was it not a desire to humiliate both of us, and to show us that we—the girl who had scorned him, and the woman who had sold herself to him—were in the end dependent upon him, and must follow his will and submit to his pleasure?

She reddened, sighed, and owned that it was true; nor did she press me any further.

A month, then, elapsed between the Carnival in February and the next great concert in the latter end of March. It was rather a special concert, for Von Francius had succeeded, in spite of many obstacles, in bringout the Choral Symphony.

He conducted well that night; and he,

Courvoisier, Friedhelm Helfen, Karl Linders, and one or two others, formed in their white heat of enthusiasm a leaven which leavened the whole lump. Orchestra and chorus alike did a little more than their possible, without which no great enthusiasm can be carried out. As I watched Von Francius, it seemed to me that a new soul had entered into the man. I did not believe that a year ago he could have conducted the Choral Symphony as he did that night. Can any one enter into the broad, eternal clang of the great "world-story" unless he has a private story of his own which may serve him in some measure as a key to its mystery? I think not. It was a night of triumph for Max von Francius. Not only was the glorious music cheered and applauded, he was called to receive a meed of thanks for having once more given to the world a never-dying joy and beauty.

I was in the chorus. Down below I saw Adelaide and her devoted attendant, Harry Arkwright. She looked whiter and more subdued than ever. All the splendour of the

praise of "joy" could not bring joy to her heart—

"Diesen Kuss der ganzen Welt"

brought no warmth to her cheek, nor lessened the load on her breast.

The concert over, we returned home. Adelaide and I retired to her dressing-room, and her maid brought us tea. She seated herself in silence. For my part, I was excited and hot, and felt my cheeks glowing. I was so stirred that I could not sit still, but moved to and fro, wishing that all the world could hear that music, and repeating lines from the *Ode to Joy*, the grand march-like measure, feeling my heart uplifted with the exaltation of its opening strain :

"Freude, schöner Götterfunken!
Tochter aus Elysium!"

As I paced about, thus excitedly, Adelaide's maid came in, with a note. Mr. Arkwright had received it from Herr von Francius, who had desired him to give it to Lady Le Marchant.

Adelaide opened it, and I went on with

my chant. I know now how dreadful it must have sounded to her.

"Freude trinken alle Wesen
An den Brüsten der Natur—"

"May!" said Adelaide faintly.

I turned in my walk and looked at her. White as death. She held the paper towards me with a steady hand, and I, the song of joy slain upon my lips, took it. It was a brief note from Von Francius.

"I let you know, my lady, first of all that I have accepted the post of Musik-direktor in ——. It will be made known to-morrow."

I held the paper and looked at her. Now I knew the reason of her pallid looks. I had indeed been blind. I might have guessed better.

"Have you read it?" she asked, and she stretched her arms above her head, as if panting for breath.

"Adelaide!" I whispered, going up to her; "Adelaide—oh!"

She fell upon my neck. She did not speak, and I, speechless, held her to my breast.

"You love him, Adelaide?" I said at last.

"With my whole soul!" she answered, in a low, very low, but vehement voice. "With my whole soul."

"And you have owned it to him?"

"Yes."

"Tell me," said I, "how it was."

"I think I have loved him since almost the first time I saw him—he made quite a different impression upon me than other men do—quite. I hardly knew myself. He mastered me. No other man ever did—except—" she shuddered a little, "and that only because I tied myself hand and foot. But I liked the mastery. It was delicious: it was rest and peace. It went on for long. We knew—each knew quite well that we loved, but he never spoke of it. He saw how it was with me and he helped me—oh, why is he so good! He never tried to trap me into any acknowledgment. He never made any use of the power he knew he had except to keep me right. But at the *Maskenball*—I do not know how it was—we were alone in all the crowd—there was

something said—a look. It was all over. But he was true to the last. He did not say, 'Throw everything up and come to me.' He said, 'Give me the only joy that we may have. Tell me you love me.' And I told him. I said, 'I love you with my life and my soul, and everything I have, for ever and ever.' And that is true. He said, 'Thank you, milady. I accept the condition of my knighthood,' and kissed my hand. There was some one following us. It was Sir Peter. He heard all, and he has punished me for it since. He will punish me again."

A pause.

"That is all that has been said. He does not know that Sir Peter knows, for he has never alluded to it since. He has spared me. I say he is a noble man."

She raised herself, and looked at me.

Dear sister! With your love and your pride, your sins and your folly, inexpressibly dear to me! I pressed a kiss upon her lips.

"Von Francius *is* good, Adelaide; he *is* good."

"Von Francius would have told me this himself, but he has been afraid for me; some time ago he said to me that he had the offer of a post at a distance. That was asking my advice. I found out what it was, and said, 'Take it.' He has done so."

"Then you have decided?" I stammered.

"To part. He has strength. So have I. It is my own fault. May—I could bear it if it were for myself alone. I have had my eyes opened now. I see that when people do wrong they drag others into it—they punish those they love—it is part of their own punishment."

A pause. Facts, I felt, were pitiless; but the glow of friendship for Von Francius was like a strong fire. In the midst of the keenest pain one finds a true man, and the discovery is like a sudden soothing of sharp anguish, or like the finding a strong comrade in a battle.

Adelaide had been very self-restrained and quiet all this time, but now suddenly broke out into low, quick, half-sobbed out words:

"Oh, I love him, I love him! It is dreadful! How shall I go through with it?"

Ay, there was the rub! Not one short sharp pang, and over—all fire quenched in cool mists of death and unconsciousness, but long years to come of daily, hourly, paying the price; incessant compunction, active punishment. A prospect for a martyr to shrink from, and for a woman who has made a mistake to—live through.

We needed not further words. The secret was told, and the worst known. We parted. Von Francius was from this moment a sacred being to me.

But from this time he scarcely came near the house—not even to give me my lessons. I went to my lodging and had them there. Adelaide said nothing, asked not a question concerning him, nor mentioned his name, and the silence on his side was almost as profound as that on hers. It seemed as if they feared that should they meet, speak, look each other in the eyes, all resolution would be swept away, and the end hurry resistless on.



CHAPTER V.

"And behold, though the way was light and the sun did shine, yet my heart was ill at ease, for a sinister blot did now and again fleck the sun, and a muttered sound perturbed the air. And he repeated oft, 'One hath told me—thus—or thus.'"

KARL LINDERS, our old acquaintance, was now our fast friend. Many changes had taken place in the *personnel* of our fellow-workmen in the *Kapelle*, but Eugen, Karl and I remained stationary, in the same places and holding the same rank as on the day we had first met. He, Karl, had been from the first more congenial to me than any other of my fellows (Eugen excepted of course). Why, I could never exactly tell. There was about

him a contagious cheerfulness, good-humour and honesty. He was a sinner, but no rascal: a wild fellow—*Taugenichts—wilder Gesell,* as our phraseology had it, but the furthest thing possible from a knave.

Since his visits to us and his earnest efforts to curry favour with Sigmund by means of nondescript wool beasts, domestic or of prey, he had grown much nearer to us. He was the only intimate we had—the only person who came in and out of our quarters at any time; the only man who sat and smoked with us in an evening. At the time when Karl put in his first appearance in these pages he was a young man not only not particular, but utterly reckless as to the society he frequented. Any one, he was wont to say, was good enough to talk with, or to listen while talked to. Karl's conversation could not be called either affected or pedantic: his taste was catholic, and comprised within wide bounds; he considered all subjects that were amusing appropriate matter of discussion, and to him most subjects were—or were susceptible of being made—amusing.

Latterly, however, it would seem that a process of growth had been going on in him. Three years had worked a difference. In some respects he was, thank heaven! still the old Karl—the old careless, reckless, aimless fellow; but in others he was metamorphosed.

Karl Linders, a handsome fellow himself and a slave to beauty, as he was careful to inform us—susceptible in the highest degree to *real* loveliness—so he often told us—and in love on an average, desperately and for ever, once a week, had at last fallen really and actually in love.

For a long time we did not guess it—or rather, accepting his being in love as a chronic state of his being—one of the "inseparable accidents," which may almost be called qualities, we wondered what lay at the bottom of his sudden intense sobriety of demeanour and propriety of conduct, and looked for some cause deeper than love, which did not usually have that effect upon him: we thought it might be debt. We studied the behaviour itself: we remarked that for upwards of ten days he had never lauded the charms of any

young woman connected with the choral or terpsichorean staff of the opera, and wondered.

We saw that he had had his hair very much cut, and we told him frankly that we did not think it improved him. To our great surprise he told us that we knew nothing about it, and requested us to mind our own business, adding testily, after a pause, that he did not see why on earth a set of men like us should make ourselves conspicuous by the fashion of our hair, as if we were Absaloms or Samsons.

"Samson had a Delilah, *mein Lieber*," said I, eyeing him. "She shore his locks for him. Tell us frankly who has acted the part by you."

"Bah! Can a fellow have no sense in his own head, to find such things out? Go and do likewise, and I can tell you you'll be improved."

But we agreed when he was gone that the loose locks, drooping over the laughing glance suited him better than that neatly-cropped propriety.

Days passed, and Karl was still not his old self. It became matter of public remark

that his easy, short jacket, a mongrel kind of garment to which he was deeply attached, was discarded, not merely for grand occasions, but even upon the ordinary Saturday night concert, yea, even for walking out at mid-day, and a superior frock-coat substituted for it—a frock-coat in which, we told him, he looked quite *edel*. At which he pished and pshawed, but surreptitiously adjusted his collar before the looking-glass which the propriety and satisfactoriness of our behaviour had induced Frau Schmidt to add to our responsibilities, pulled his cuffs down, and remarked *en passant*, that "the *'cello* was a horribly ungraceful instrument."

"Not as *you* use it," said we both politely, and allowed him to lead the way to the concert-room.

A few evenings later he strolled into our room, lit a cigar, and sighed deeply.

"What ails thee, then, Karl?" I asked.

"I've something on my mind," he replied uneasily.

"That we know," put in Eugen; "and a pretty big lump it must be, too. Out with

it, man! Has she accepted the bottle-nosed oboist after all?"

"No."

"Have you got into debt? How much? I dare say we can manage it between us."

"No—oh no! I'm five thalers to the good."

Our countenances grew more serious. *Not* debt? Then what was it, what could it be?

"I hope nothing has happened to Gretchen," suggested Eugen, for Gretchen, his sister, was the one permanently strong love of Karl's heart.

"Oh no! *Das Mädel* is very well, and getting on in her classes."

"Then *what* is it?"

"I'm—engaged—to be married."

I grieve to say that Eugen and I, after staring at him for some few minutes, until we had taken in the announcement, both burst into the most immoderate laughter—till the tears ran down our cheeks, and our sides ached.

Karl sat quite still, unresponsive, puffing away at his cigar; and when we had finished, or rather were becoming a little more moderate

in the expression of our amusement, he knocked the ash away from the weed, and remarked:

"That's blind jealousy. You both know that there isn't a *Mädchen* in the place who would look at you, so you try to laugh at people who are better off than yourselves."

This was so stinging (from the tone, more than the words) as coming from the most sweet-tempered fellow I ever knew, that we stopped—Eugen apologised, and we asked who the lady was.

"I shouldn't suppose you cared to know," said he, rather sulkily. "And it's all very fine to laugh, but let me see the man who even smiles at her—he shall learn who I am."

We assured him, with the strongest expressions that we could call to our aid, that it was the very idea of his *being* engaged that made us laugh—not any disrespect, and begged his pardon again. By degrees he relented. We still urgently demanded the name of the lady.

"*Als Verlobte empfehlen sich* Karl Linders and—who else?" asked Eugen.

"*Als Verlobte empfehlen sich** Karl Linders and Clara Steinmann," said Karl, with much dignity.

"Clara Steinmann," we repeated in tones of respectful gravity, "I never heard of her."

"No, she keeps herself rather reserved and select," said Karl impressively. "She lives with her aunt in the Alléestrasse, at number 39."

"Number thirty-nine!" we both ejaculated.

"Exactly so! What have you to say against it?" demanded Herr Linders, glaring round upon us with an awful majesty.

"Nothing—oh, less than nothing. But I know now where you mean. It is a boarding-house, *nicht wahr?*"

He nodded sedately.

"I have seen the young lady," said I, carefully observing all due respect. "Eugen, you must have seen her too. Miss Wedder-

* The German custom on an engagement taking place is to announce it with the above words, signifying "M. and N. announce (or recommend) themselves as betrothed." This appears in the newspaper—as a marriage with us.

burn used to come with her to the *Instrumental* Concerts before she began to sing."

"Right!" said Karl graciously. "She did. Clara liked Miss Wedderburn very much."

"Indeed!" said we respectfully, and fully recognising that this was quite a different affair from any of the previous flirtations with chorus-singers and ballet-girls which had taken up so much of his attention.

"I don't know her," said I, "I have not that pleasure, but I am sure you are to be congratulated, old fellow—so I do congratulate you very heartily."

"Thank you," said he.

"I can't congratulate *you*, Karl, as I don't know the lady," said Eugen, "but I do congratulate *her*," laying his hand upon Karl's shoulder; "I hope she knows the kind of man she has won, and is worthy of him."

A smile, of the Miss Squeers description—"Tilda, I pities your ignorance and despises you,"—crossed Karl's lips as he said:

"Thank you. No one else knows. It only took place—decidedly, you know, to-night.

I said I should tell two friends of mine—she said she had no objection. I should not have liked to keep it from you two. I wish," said Karl, whose eyes had been roving in a seeking manner round the room, and who now brought his words out with a run; "I wish Sigmund had been here too. I wish she could have seen him. She loves children: she has been very good to Gretchen."

Eugen's hand dropped from our friend's shoulder. He walked to the window without speaking, and looked out into the darkness—as he was then in more senses than one often wont to do—nor did he break the silence nor look at us again until some time after Karl and I had resumed the conversation.

So did the quaint fellow announce his engagement to us. It was quite a romantic little history, for it turned out that he had loved the girl for full two years, but for a long time had not been able even to make her acquaintance, and when that was accomplished had hardly dared to speak of his love for her; for though she was sprung from much the same class as himself she was in

much better circumstances, and accustomed to a life of ease and plenty, even if she were little better in reality than a kind of working-housekeeper. A second suitor for her hand had, however, roused Karl into boldness and activity: he declared himself, and was accepted. Despite the opposition of Frau Steinmann, who thought the match in every way beneath her niece (why, I never could tell), the lovers managed to carry their purpose so far as the betrothal or *Verlobung* went: marriage was a question strictly of the future. It was during the last weeks of suspense and uncertainty that Karl had been unable to carry things off in quite his usual light-hearted manner: it was after finally conquering that he came to make us partakers in his satisfaction.

In time we had the honour of an introduction to Fräulein Steinmann, and our amazement and amusement were equally great. Karl was a tall, handsome, well-knit fellow, with an exceptionally graceful figure and what I call a typical German face (typical, I mean, in one line of development)—open,

frank, handsome, with the broad traits, smiling lips, clear and direct guileless eyes, waving hair and aptitude for geniality which are the chief characteristics of that type—not the highest, perhaps, but a good one, nevertheless—honest, loyal, brave—a kind which makes good fathers and good soldiers—how many a hundred are mourned since 1870-71!

He had fallen in love with a little stout dumpy *Mädchen,* honest and open as himself, but stupid in all outside domestic matters. She was evidently desperately in love with him, and could understand a good *waltz* or a sentimental song, so that his musical talents were not altogether thrown away. I liked her better after a time. There was something touching in the way in which she said to me once :

"He might have done so much better. I am such an ugly, stupid thing, but when he said did I love him or could I love him, or something like that, *um Gotteswillen,* Herr Helfen, what could I say?"

"I am sure you did the best possible

thing both for him and for you," I was able to say, with emphasis and conviction.

Karl had now become a completely reformed and domesticated member of society: now he wore the frock-coat several times a week, and confided to me that he thought he must have a new one soon. Now too did other strange results appear of his engagement to Fräulein Clara (he got sentimental and called her *Clärchen* sometimes). He had now the entrée of Frau Steinmann's house and there met feminine society several degrees above that to which he had been accustomed. He was obliged to wear a permanently polite and polished manner (which, let me hasten to say, was not the least trouble to him). No chaffing of these young ladies—no offering to take them to places of amusement of any but the very sternest and severest respectability.

He took Fräulein Clara out for walks. They jogged along arm-in-arm, Karl radiant, Clara no less so, and sometimes they were accompanied by another inmate of Frau Steinmann's house—a contrast to them both.

She lived *en famille* with her hostess, not having an income large enough to admit of indulging in quite separate quarters, and her name was Anna Sartorius.

It was very shortly after his engagement that Karl began to talk to me about Anna Sartorius. She was a clever young woman, it seemed—or as he called her, a *gescheidtes Mädchen.* She could talk most wonderfully. She had travelled—she had been in England and France, and seen the world, said Karl. They all passed very delightful evenings together sometimes, diversified with music and song and the racy jest—at which times Frau Steinmann became quite another person, and he, Karl, felt himself in heaven.

The substance of all this was told me by him one day at a Probe, where Eugen had been conspicuous by his absence. Perhaps the circumstance reminded Karl of some previous conversation, for he said:

"She must have seen Courvoisier before somewhere. She asks a good many questions about him, and when I said I knew him she laughed."

"Look here, Karl! don't go talking to outsiders about Eugen—or any of us. His affairs are no business of Fräulein Sartorius, or any other busybody."

"*I* talk about him! What do you mean? Upon my word I don't know how the conversation took that turn; but I am sure she knows something about him. She said 'Eugen Courvoisier indeed!' and laughed in a *very* peculiar way."

"She is a fool. So are you if you let her talk to you about him."

"She is no fool, and I want to talk to no one but my own *Mädchen*," said he easily; "but when a woman is talking one can't stop one's ears."

Time passed. The concert with the Choral Symphony followed. Karl had had the happiness of presenting tickets to Fräulein Clara and her aunt, and of seeing them, in company with Miss Sartorius, enjoying looking at the dresses, and saying how loud the music was. His visits to Frau Steinmann continued.

"Friedel," he remarked abruptly one day

to me, as we paced down the Casernenstrasse, "I wonder who Courvoisier is!"

"You have managed to exist very comfortably for three or four years without knowing."

"There is something *behind* all his secrecy about himself."

"Fräulein Sartorius says so, I suppose," I remarked dryly.

"N—no; she never *said* so; but I think she knows it is so."

"And what if it be so?"

"Oh, nothing! But I wonder what can have driven him here."

"*Driven* him here? His own choice, of course."

Karl laughed.

"*Nee, nee,* Friedel, not quite."

"I should advise you to let him and his affairs alone, unless you want a row with him. I would no more think of asking him than of cutting off my right hand."

"Asking him—*lieber Himmel!* no; but one may wonder—— It was a very queer thing his sending poor Sigmund off in that style. I wonder where he is."

"I don't know."

"Did he never tell you ?"

"No."

"Queer !" said Karl reflectively. "I think there is something odd behind it all."

"Now listen, Karl. Do you *want* to have a row with Eugen ? Are you anxious for him never to speak to you again ?"

"*Herrgott,* no !"

"Then take my advice, and just keep your mouth shut. Don't listen to tales, and don't repeat them."

"But, my dear fellow, when there is a mystery about a man——"

"Mystery ! Nonsense ! What mystery is there in a man's choosing to have private affairs ? *We* didn't behave in this idiotic manner when you were going on like a lunatic about Fräulein Clara. We simply assumed that as you didn't speak you had affairs which you chose to keep to yourself. Just apply the rule, or it may be worse for you."

"For all that, there is something *queer,*" he said, as we turned into the Restauration for dinner.

Yet again, some days later, just before the last concert came off, Karl, talking to me, said, in a tone and with a look as if the idea troubled and haunted him :

"I say, Friedel, do you think that Courvoisier's being here is all square ?"

"All square ?" I repeated scornfully.

He nodded.

"Yes. Of course all has been right since he came here ; but don't you think there may be something shady in the background ?"

"What do you mean by 'shady' ?" I asked, more annoyed than I cared to confess at his repeated returning to the subject.

"Well, you know, there must be a *reason* for his being here——"

I burst into a fit of laughter, which was not so mirthful as it might seem.

"I should rather think there *must*. Isn't there a reason for every one being somewhere ? Why am I here ? Why are you here ?"

"Yes ; but this is quite a different thing. We are all agreed that whatever he may

be now, he has not always been one of us, and I like things to be clear about people."

"It is a most extraordinary thing that you should only have felt the anxiety lately," said I witheringly, and then, after a moment's reflection, I said:

"Look here, Karl; no one could be more unwilling than I to pick a quarrel with you, but quarrel we must if this talking of Eugen behind his back goes on. It is nothing to either of us *what* his past has been. *I* want no references. If you want to gossip about him or any one else, go to the old women who are the natural exchangers of that commodity. Only if you mention it again to me it comes to a quarrel—*verstehst du?*"

"I meant no harm, and I can see no harm in it," said he.

"Very well; but I do. I hate it. So shake hands, and let there be an end of it. I wish now that I had spoken out at first. There's a dirtiness, to my mind, in the idea of speculating about a person with whom you are intimate, in a way that you wouldn't like him to hear."

"Well, if you will have it so," said he; but there was not the usual look of open satisfaction upon his face. He did not mention the subject to me again, but I caught him looking now and then earnestly at Eugen, as if he wished to ask him something. Then I knew that in my anxiety to avoid gossiping about the friend whose secrets were sacred to me, I had made a mistake. I ought to have made Karl tell me whether he had heard anything specific about him or against him, and so judge the extent of the mischief done.

It needed but little thought on my part to refer Karl's suspicions and vague rumours to the agency of Anna Sartorius. Lately I had begun to observe this young lady more closely. She was a tall, dark, plain girl, with large, defiant-looking eyes, and a bitter mouth; when she smiled there was nothing genial in the smile. When she spoke, her voice had a certain harsh flavour; her laugh was hard and mocking—as if she laughed at, not with people. There was something rather striking in her appearance, but little pleasing.

She looked at odds with the world, or with her lot in it, or with her present circumstances, or *something.* I was satisfied that she knew something of Eugen, though, when I once pointed her out to him and asked if he knew her, he looked at her, and after a moment's look, as if he remembered, shook his head, saying :

"There is something a little familiar to me in her face, but I am sure I have never seen her—most assuredly never spoken to her."

Yet I had often seen her look at him long and earnestly, usually with a certain peculiar smile, and with her head a little to one side as if she examined some curiosity or *lusus naturæ.* I was too little curious myself to know Eugen's past, to speculate much about it; but I was quite sure that there was some link between him and that dark, bitter, sarcastic-looking girl, Anna Sartorius.



CHAPTER VI.

Didst thou, or didst thou not? Just tell me, friend!
Not that *my* conscience may be satisfied,
I never for a moment doubted thee—
But that I may have wherewithal in hand
To turn against them when they point at thee:
A whip to flog them with—a rock to crush—
Thy word—thy simple downright 'No, I did not.'

* * * * * *

Why! How!
What's this? He does not, will not speak. Oh God!
Nay, raise thy head, and look me in the eyes!
Canst not? What is this thing?

IT was the last concert of the season, and the end of April, when evenings were growing pleasantly long and the air balmy. Those last concerts,

and the last nights of the opera, which closed at the end of April, until September, were always crowded. That night I remember we had Liszt's *Prometheus*, and a great violinist had been announced as coming to enrapture the audience with the performance of a Concerto of Beethoven's.

The concert was for the benefit of Von Francius, and was probably the last one at which he would conduct us. He was leaving to assume the post of *Königlicher Musik Direktor* at ——. Now that the time came there was not a man amongst us who was not heartily sorry to think of the parting.

Miss Wedderburn was one of the soloists that evening, and her sister and Mr. Arkwright were both there.

Karl Linders came on late. I saw that just before he appeared by the orchestra entrance, his beloved, her aunt, and Fräulein Sartorius had taken their places in the *Parquet*. Karl looked sullen and discontented, and utterly unlike himself. Anna Sartorius was half smiling. Lady Le Marchant, I noticed, passingly, looked the shadow of her former self.

Then Von Francius came on; he too looked disturbed, for him very much so, and glanced round the orchestra and the room; and then coming up to Eugen, drew him a little aside, and seemed to put a question to him. The discussion, though carried on in low tones, was animated, and lasted some time. Von Francius appeared greatly to urge Courvoisier to something—the latter to resist. At last some understanding appeared to be come to. Von Francius returned to his estrade, Eugen to his seat, and the concert began.

The third piece on the list was the Violin Concerto, and when its turn came all eyes turned in all directions in search of ——, the celebrated, who was to perform it. Von Francius advanced and made a short enough announcement.

"*Meine Herrschaften,* I am sorry to say that I have received a telegram from Herr ——, saying that sudden illness prevents his playing to-night. I am sorry that you should be disappointed of hearing him, but I cannot regret that you should have an opportunity of listening to one who will be a very

effectual substitute — Herr Concertmeister Courvoisier, your first violin."

He stepped back. Courvoisier rose. There was a dead silence in the hall. Eugen stood in the well-known position of the prophet without honour, only that he had not yet begun to speak. The rest of the orchestra and Von Francius were waiting to begin Beethoven's Concerto; but Eugen, lifting his voice, addressed them in his turn:

"I am sorry to say that I dare not venture upon the great Concerto; it is so long since I attempted it. I shall have pleasure in trying to play a *Chaconne*—one of the compositions of Herr von Francius."

Von Francius started up as if to forbid it. But Eugen had touched the right key. There was a round of applause, and then an expectant settling down to listen on the part of the audience, who were, perhaps, better pleased to hear Von Francius the living and much discussed, than Beethoven the dead and undisputed.

It was a minor measure, and one unknown to the public, for it had not yet been

published. Von Francius had lent Eugen the score a few days ago, and he had once or twice said to me that it was full not merely of talent; it was replete with the fire of genius.

And so, indeed, he proved to us that night. Never, before or since, from professional or private virtuoso, have I heard such playing as that. The work was in itself a fine one; original, strong, terse and racy, like him who had composed it. It was sad, very sad, but there was a magnificent elevation running all through it which raised it far above a mere complaint, gave a depth to its tragedy while it pointed at hope. And this, interpreted by Eugen, whose mood and whose inner life it seemed exactly to suit, was a thing not to be forgotten in a lifetime. To me the scene and the sounds come freshly as if heard yesterday. I see the great hall full of people, attentive—more than attentive—every moment more enthralled. I see the pleased smile which had broken upon every face of his fellow-musicians at this chance of distinction, gradually subside into admiration and profound appreciation; I feel again the warm

glow of joy which filled my own heart; I meet again May's eyes and see the light in them, and see Von Francius shade his face with his hand to conceal the intensity of the artist's delight he felt at hearing his own creation so grandly, so passionately interpreted.

Then I see how it was all over, and Eugen, pale with the depth of emotion with which he had played the passionate music, retired, and there came a burst of enthusiastic applause—applause renewed again and again —it was a veritable *succès fou.*

But he would make no response to the plaudits. He remained obstinately seated, and there was no elation, but rather gloom upon his face. In vain Von Francius besought him to come forward. He declined, and the calls at last ceased. It was the last piece on the first part of the programme. The people at last let him alone. But there could be no doubt that he had both roused a great interest in himself and stimulated the popularity of Von Francius in no common degree. And at last he had to go down the orchestra steps to receive a great many con-

gratulations, and go through several introductions, while I sat still and mentally rubbed my hands.

Meanwhile Karl Linders, with nearly all the other instrumentalists, had disappeared from the orchestra. I saw him appear again in the body of the hall, amongst all the people, who were standing up, laughing and discussing and roving about to talk to their friends. He had a long discussion with Fräulein Clara and Anna Sartorius.

And then I turned my attention to Eugen again, who, looking grave and unelated, released himself as soon as possible from his group of new acquaintance and joined me.

Then Von Francius brought Miss Wedderburn up the steps, and left her sitting near us. She turned to Eugen and said, "*Ich gratulire*," to which he only bowed rather sadly. Her chair was quite close to ours, and Von Francius stood talking to her. Others were quickly coming. One or two were around and behind us.

Eugen was tuning his violin, when a touch on the shoulder roused me. I looked up. Karl Linders stood there, leaning across me

towards Eugen. Something in his face told me that *it*—that which had been hanging so long over us—was coming. His expression, too, attracted the attention of several other people—of all who were immediately around.

Those who heard Karl were myself, Von Francius, Miss Wedderburn, and some two or three others, who had looked up as he came, and had paused to watch what was coming.

"Eugen," said he, "a foul lie has been told about you."

"So!"

"Of course I don't believe a word of it. I'm not such a fool. But I have been challenged to confront you with it. It only needs a syllable on your side to crush it instantly; for I will take your word against all the rest of the world put together."

"Well?" said Eugen, whose face was white, and whose voice was low.

"A lady has said to me that you had a brother who had acted the part of father to you, and that you rewarded his kindness by forging his name for a sum of money, which you could have had for the asking; for he

denied you nothing. It is almost too ridiculous to repeat, and I beg your pardon for doing it; but I was obliged. Will you give me a word of denial?"

Silence.

I looked at Eugen. We were all looking at him. Three things I looked for as equally likely for him to do; but he did none. He did not start up in indignant denial; he did not utter icily an icy word of contempt; he did not smile and ask Karl if he were out of his senses. He dropped his eyes, and maintained a deadly silence.

Karl was looking at him, and his candid face changed. Doubt, fear, dismay succeeded one another upon it. Then, in a lower and changed voice, as if first admitting the idea that caution might be necessary:

"*Um Gotteswillen,* Eugen! Speak!"

He looked up—so may look a dog that is being tortured—and my very heart sickened; but he did not speak.

A few moments—not half a minute—did we remain thus. It seemed a hundred years of slow agony. But during that time I tried

to comprehend that my friend of the bright, clear eyes, and open, fearless glance; the very soul and flower of honour; my ideal of almost Quixotic chivalrousness, stood with eyes that could not meet ours that hung upon him; face white, expression downcast, accused of a crime which came, if ever crime did, under the category "dirty," and not denying it!

Karl, the wretched beginner of the wretched scene, came nearer, took the other's hand, and, in a hoarse whisper, said:

"For God's sake, Eugen, speak! Deny it! You can deny it—you *must* deny it!"

He looked up at last, with a tortured gaze; looked at Karl, at me, at the faces around. His white lips quivered faintly. Silence yet. And yet it seemed to me that it was loathing that was most strongly depicted upon his face; the loathing of a man who is *obliged* to intimately examine some unclean thing; the loathing of one who has to drag a corpse about with him.

"Say it is a lie, Eugen!" Karl conjured him.

At last came speech; at last an answer;

slow, low, tremulous, impossible to mistake or explain away.

"No; I cannot say so."

His head—that proud, high head—drooped again, as if he would fain avoid our eyes.

Karl raised himself. *His* face, too, was white. As if stricken with some mortal blow, he walked away. Some people who had surrounded us turned aside and began to whisper to each other behind their music. Von Francius looked impenetrable; May Wedderburn white. The noise and bustle was still going on all around, louder than before. The drama had not taken three minutes to play out.

Eugen rested his brow for a moment on his hand, and his face was hidden. He looked up, rising as he did so, and his eyes met those of Miss Wedderburn. So sad, so deep a gaze I never saw. It was a sign to me, a significant one, that he *could* meet her eyes.

Then he turned to Von Francius.

"Herr Direktor, Helfen will take my place, *nicht wahr?*"

Von Francius bowed. Eugen left his seat, made his way, without a word, from the

orchestra, and Von Francius rapping sharply, the preliminary tumult subsided; the concert began.

I glanced once or twice towards Karl; I received no answering look. I could not even see his face; he had made himself as small as possible behind his music.

The concert over—and it seemed to me interminable—I was hastening away, anxious only to find Eugen, when Karl Linders stopped me in a retired corner, and holding me fast, said:

"Friedel, I am a damned fool."

"I am sorry not to be able to contradict you."

"Listen," said he. "You must listen, or I shall follow you and make you. I made up my mind not to hear another word against him, but when I went to *die Clara* after the solo, I found her and that confounded girl whispering together. She—Anna Sartorius—said it was very fine for such scamps to cover their sins with music. I asked her pretty stiffly what she meant, for she is always slanging Eugen, and I thought she might have let him alone for once. She said she

meant that he was a blackguard—that's the word she used—*ein lauter Spitzbube*—a forger, and worse. I told her I believed it was a lie. I did not believe it.

"'Ask him,' said she. I said I would be—something—first. But Clara would have nothing to say to me, and they both badgered me until for mere quietness I agreed to do as they wished."

He went on in distress for some time.

"Oh, drop it!" said I impatiently. "You have done the mischief. I don't want to listen to your whining over it. Go to the Fräulein Steinmann and Sartorius. They will confer the reward of merit upon you."

"*Gott behüte!*"

I shook myself loose from him and took my way home. It was with a feeling not far removed from tremulousness that I entered the room. That poor room formed a temple which I had no intention of desecrating.

He was sitting at the table when I entered, and looked at me absently. Then, with a smile in which sweetness and bitterness were strangely mingled, said:

"So! you have returned? I will not trouble you much longer. Give me houseroom for to-night. In the morning I shall be gone."

I went up to him, pushed the writing materials which lay before him away, and took his hands, but could not speak for ever so long.

"Well, Friedhelm," he asked, after a pause, during which the drawn and tense look upon his face relaxed somewhat, "what have you to say to the man who has let you think him honest for three years?"

"Whom I know, and ever have known, to be an honest man."

He laughed.

"There are degrees and grades even in honesty. One kind of honesty is lower than others. I am honest now because my sin has found me out, and I can't keep up appearances any longer."

"Pooh! do you suppose that deceives *me?*" said I contemptuously. "Me, who have known you for three years. That *would* be a joke, but one that no one will enjoy at my expense."

A momentary expression of pleasure un-

utterable flashed across his face and into his eyes, then was repressed, as he said:

"You must listen to reason. Have I not told you all along that my life had been spoiled by my own fault?—that I had disqualified myself to take any leading part amongst men?—that others might advance, but I should remain where I was? And have you not the answer to all here? You are a generous soul, I know, like few others. My keenest regret now is that I did not tell you long ago how things stood, but it would have cost me your friendship, and I have not too many things to make life sweet to me."

"Eugen, why did you not tell me before? I know the reason: for the very same reason which prevents you from looking me in the eyes *now*, and saying, 'I am guilty. I did that of which I am accused,' because *it is not true.* I challenge you: meet my eyes, and say, 'I am guilty.'"

He looked at me; his eyes were dim with anguish. He said:

"Friedel, I—cannot tell you that I am innocent."

"I did not ask you to do so. I asked you to say you were guilty, and on your soul be it if you lie to me. That I could never forgive."

Again he looked at me, strove to speak, but no word came. I never removed my eyes from his: the pause grew long, till I dropped his hands and turned away with a smile.

"Let a hundred busybodies raise their clamouring tongues, they can never divide you and me. If it were not insulting I should ask you to believe that every feeling of mine for you is unchanged, and will remain so as long as I live."

"It is incredible. Such loyalty, such—Friedel, you are a fool!"

His voice broke.

"I wish you could have heard Miss Wedderburn sing her English song after you were gone. It was called 'What would you do, Love?' and she made us all cry."

"Ah, Miss Wedderburn! how delightful she is!"

"If it is any comfort to you to know, I can

assure you that she thinks as I do. I am certain of it."

"Comfort—not much. It is only that *if* I ever allowed myself to fall in love again, which I shall not do, it would be with Miss Wedderburn."

The tone sufficiently told me that he was much in love with her already.

"She is bewitching," he added.

"If you do not mean to allow yourself to fall in love with her, I would not see too much of her," I remarked sententiously, "because it seems that 'allowing' is a matter for her to decide, not the men who happen to know her."

"I shall not see much more of her. I shall not remain here."

As this was what I had fully expected to hear I said nothing, but I thought of Miss Wedderburn, and grieved for her.

"Yes, I must go forth from hence," he pursued. "I suppose I ought to be satisfied that I have had three years here. I wonder if there is any way in which a man could kill all trace of his old self; a man who has every

desire to lead henceforth a new life, and be at peace and charity with all men. I suppose not—no. I suppose the brand has to be carried about till the last; and how long it may be before that 'last' comes!"

I was silent. I had put a good face upon the matter and spoken bravely about it. I had told him that I did not believe him guilty—that my regard and respect were as high as ever, and I spoke the truth. Both before and since then he had told me that I had a bump of veneration, and one of belief, ludicrously out of proportion to the exigencies of the age in which I lived.

Be it so. Despite my cheerful words, and despite the belief I did feel in him, I could not help seeing that he carried himself now as a marked man. The free, open look was gone; a blight had fallen upon him, and he withered under it. There was what the English call a "down" look upon his face, which had not been there formerly, even in those worst days when the parting from Sigmund was immediately before and behind us.

In the days which immediately followed the scene at the concert I noticed how he would set about things with a kind of hurried zeal, then suddenly stop and throw them aside, as if sick of them, and fall to brooding with head sunk upon his breast, and lowering brow; a state and a spectacle which caused me pain and misery not to be described. He would begin sudden conversations with me, starting with some question, as:

"Friedel, do you believe in a future state?"

"I do, and I don't. I mean to say that I don't know anything about it."

"Do you know what my idea of heaven would be?"

"Indeed I don't," said I, feebly endeavouring a feeble joke. "A place where all the fiddles are by Stradivarius and Guanarius, and all the music comes up to Beethoven."

"No; but a place *where there are no mistakes.*"

"No mistakes?"

"*Ja wohl!* Where it would not be possible for a man with fair chances to spoil his whole career by a single mistake. Or, if

there were mistakes, I would arrange that the punishment should be in some proportion to them—not a large punishment for a little sin, and *vice versâ*."

"Well, I should think that if there is any heaven there would *be* some arrangement of that kind."

"As for hell," he went on in a low, calm tone which I had learnt to understand meant with him intense earnestness, "there are people who wonder that any one could invent a hell. *My* only wonder is why they should have resorted to fire and brimstone to enhance its terrors when they had the earth full of misery to choose from."

"You think this world a hell, Eugen?"

"Sometimes I think it the very nethermost hell of hells, and I think, if you had my feelings you would think so too. A poet, an English poet (you do not know the English poets as you ought, Friedhelm), has said that the fiercest of all hells is the failure in a great purpose. I used to think that a fine sentiment; now I sometimes wonder whether to a man who was once inclined to think well

of himself it may not be a much fiercer trial to look back and find that he has failed to be commonly honest and upright. It is a nice little distinction—a moral wire-drawing which I would recommend to the romancers if I knew any."

Once and only once was Sigmund mentioned between us, and Eugen said:

"Nine years, were you speaking of? No—not in nineteen, nor in ninety-nine shall I ever see him again."

"Why?"

"The other night, and what occurred then, decided me. Till then I had some consolation in thinking that the blot might perhaps be wiped out—the shame lived down. Now I see that that is a fallacy. With God's help I will never see him nor speak to him again. It is better that he should forget me."

His voice did not tremble as he said this, though I knew that the idea of being forgotten by Sigmund must be to *him* anguish of a refinement not to be measured by *me*.

I bided my time, saying nothing. I at least was too much engrossed with my own affairs to foresee the cloud then first dawning on the horizon, which they who looked towards France and Spain might perhaps perceive.

It had not come yet—the first crack of that thunder which rattled so long over our land, and when we saw the dingy old *Jäger Hof* at one end of the Hofgarten, and heard by chance the words Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen, no premonition touched us. My mind was made up, that let Eugen go when and where he would, I would go with him.

I had no ties of duty, none of love or of ambition to separate me from him; his God should be my God, and his people my people; if the God were a jealous God dealing out wrath and terror, and the people should dwindle to outcasts and pariahs, it mattered not to me. I loved him.



CHAPTER VII.

"Nein, länger kann ich diesen Kampf nicht kämpfen,
Den Riesenkampf der Pflicht.
Kannst du des Herzen's Flammentrieb nicht dämpfen,
So fordre, Tugend, dieses Opfer nicht.

"Geschworen hab' ich 's, ja, ich hab's geschworen,
Mich selbst zu bändigen.
Hier ist dein Kranz, er sei auf ewig mir verloren;
Nimm ihn zurück und lass mich sündigen."

SCHILLER.

IF I had never had a trouble before I had one now—large, stalwart, robust. For what seemed to me a long time there was present to my mind's eye little but the vision of a large, lighted room — a great undefined crowd surging around and below, a small knot of persons and faces in sharp distinctness immediately around me; low-spoken words with a ques-

tion; no answer—vehement imploring for an answer—still no reply; yet another sentence conjuring denial, and then the answer itself—the silence that succeeded it; the face which had become part of my thoughts all changed and downcast—the man whom I had looked up to, feared, honoured, as chivalrous far beyond his station and circumstances slowly walking away from the company of his fellows, disgraced—fallen; having himself owned to the disgrace being merited, pointed at as a cheat—bowing to the accusation.

It drove me almost mad to think of it. I suffered the more keenly because I could speak to no one of what had happened. What sympathy should I get from any living soul by explaining my sick looks and absent demeanour with the words, "I love that man who is disgraced?" I smiled dryly in the midst of my anguish, and locked it the deeper in my own breast.

I had believed in him so devotedly, so intensely, had loved him so entirely, and with such a humility, such a consciousness of my own shortcomings and of his superiority.

The recoil at first was such as one might experience who embraces a veiled figure, presses his lips to where its lips should be, and finds that he kisses a corpse.

Such, I say, was the recoil at *first*. But a recoil, from its very nature, is short and vehement. There are some natures, I believe, which after a shock turn and flee from the shocking agent. Not so I. After figuratively springing back and pressing my hands over my eyes, I removed them again, and still saw his face, and—it tortured me to have to own it, but I had to do so—still loved that face beyond all earthly things.

It grew by degrees familiar to me again. I caught myself thinking of the past and smiling at the remembrance of the jokes between Eugen and Helfen on Carnival Monday, then pulled myself up with a feeling of horror, and the conviction that I had no business to be thinking of him at all. But I did think of him day by day and hour by hour, and tortured myself with thinking of him, and wished, yet dreaded, to see him, and wondered how I possibly could see him, and could only live on

in a hope which was not fulfilled. For I had no right to seek him out. His condition might be much—very much to me. My sympathy or pity or thought—as I felt all too keenly—could be nothing to him.

Meanwhile, as is usual in such cases, Circumstance composedly took my affairs into her hands and settled them for me without my being able to move a finger in the matter.

The time was approaching for the departure of Von Francius. Adelaide and I did not exchange a syllable upon the subject. Of what use? I knew to a certain extent what was passing within her. I knew that this child of the world—were we not all children of the world, and not of light?—had braced her moral forces to meet the worst, and was awaiting it calmly.

Adelaide, like me, based her actions not upon religion. Religion was for both of us an utter abstraction; it touched us not. That which gave Adelaide force to withstand temptation, and to remain stoically in the drear sphere in which she already found herself, was not religion; it was pride on the one

hand, and on the other love for Max von Francius.

Pride forbade her to forfeit her reputation, which was dear to her, though her position had lost the charms with which distance had once gilded it for her. Love for Von Francius made her struggle with all the force of her nature to remain where she was, renounce him blamelessly rather than yield at the price which women must pay who do such things as leave their husbands.

It was wonderful to me to see how love had developed in her every higher emotion. I remembered how cynical she had always been as to the merits of her own sex. Women, according to her, were an inferior race, who gained their poor ends by poor means. She had never been hard upon female trickery and subterfuge. Bah ! she said, how else are they to get what they want ? But now with the exalted opinion of a man, had come exalted ideas as to the woman fit for his wife.

Since to go to him she must be stained and marked for ever, she would remain away from him. Never should any circumstance con-

nected with him be made small or contemptible by any act of hers. I read the motive, and, reading it, read her.

Von Francius was, equally with herself, distinctly and emphatically a child of the world—as she honoured him he honoured her. He proved his strength and the innate nobility of his nature by his stoic abstinence from evasion of or rebellion against the decree which had gone out against their love. He was a better man, a greater artist, a more sympathetic nature now than before. His passage through the furnace had cleansed him. He was a standing example to me that despite what our preachers and our poets, our philosophers and our novelists are incessantly dinning into our ears, there are yet men who can renounce—men to whom honour and purity are still the highest goddesses.

I saw him, naturally, and often during these days—so dark for all of us. He spoke to me of his prospects in his new post. He asked me if I would write to him occasionally, even if it should only be three or four times in the year.

"Indeed I will, if you care to hear from me," said I much moved.

This was at our last music lesson, in my dark little room at the Wehrhahn. Von Francius had made it indeed a lesson, more than a lesson, a remembrance to carry with me for ever, for he had been playing Beethoven and Schubert to me.

"Fräulein May, everything concerning you and yours will *ever* be of the very deepest interest to me," he said, looking earnestly at me. "Take a few words of advice and information from one who has never felt anything for you since he first met you but the truest friendship. You have in you the materials of a great artist; whether you have the Spartan courage and perseverance requisite to attain the position, I can hardly tell. If you choose to become an artist, *eine vollkommene Künstlerin*, you must give everything else up—love and marriage and all that interferes with your art, for, *liebes Fräulein*, you cannot pursue two things at once."

"Then I have every chance of becoming as great an artist as possible," said I; "for

none of those things will ever interfere with my pursuit of art."

"Wait till the time of probation comes; you are but eighteen yet," said he kindly, but sceptically.

"Herr von Francius"—the words started to my lips as the truth started into my mind, and fell from them in the strong desire to speak to *some* one of the matter that then filled my whole soul—"I can tell you the truth—you will understand—the time of probation has been—it is over—past. I am free for the future."

"So!" said he in a very low voice, and his eyes were filled, less with pity than with a fellow-feeling which made them "wondrous kind." "You, too, have suffered, and given up. There are then four people—you and I, and one whose name I will not speak, and—may I guess once, Fräulein May?"

I bowed.

"My first violinist, *nicht wahr?*"

Again I assented, silently. He went on:

"Fate is perverse about these things. And now, my fair pupil, you understand somewhat

more that no true artist is possible without sorrow and suffering and *renunciation.* And you will think sometimes of your old, fault-finding, grumbling master—*ja?*"

"Oh, Herr von Francius?" cried I, laying my hand upon the key-board of the piano, and sobbing aloud. "The kindest, best, most patient, gentle——"

I could say no more.

"That is mere nonsense, my dear May," he said, passing his hand over my prostrate head; and I felt that it—the strong hand—trembled. "I want a promise from you. Will you sing for me next season?"

"If I am alive, and you send for me, I will."

"Thanks. And—one other word. Some one very dear to us both is very sad; she will become sadder. You, my child, have the power of allaying sadness, and soothing grief and bitterness in a remarkable degree. Will you expend some of that power upon her when her burden grows very hard, and think that with each word of kindness to her you bind my heart more fast to yourself?"

"I will—indeed I will."

"We will not say good-bye, but only *Auf Wiedersehen!*" said he. "You and I shall meet again. I am sure of that. *Meine liebe, gute Schülerin,* adieu!"

Choked with tears, I passively let him raise my hand to his lips. I hid my face in my handkerchief, to repress my fast-flowing tears. I would not, because I dared not, look at him. The sight of his kind and trusted face would give me too much pain.

He loosed my hand. I heard steps; a door opened and closed. He was gone! My last lesson was over. My trusty friend had departed. He was to leave Elberthal on the following day.

* * * * *

The next night there was an entertainment—half concert, half theatricals, wholly dilettante—at the *Malkasten,* the Artists' Club. We, as is the duty of a decorous English family, buried all our private griefs, and appeared at the entertainment, to which, indeed, Adelaide had received a special invitation. I was

going to remain with Adelaide until Sir Peter's return, which, we understood, was to be in the course of a few weeks, and then I was going to ——, by the advice of Von Francius, there to finish my studies.

Dearly though I loved music, divine as she ever has been, and will be, to me, yet the idea of leaving Von Francius for other masters had at first almost shaken my resolution to persevere. But, as I said, all this was taken out of my hands by an irresistible concourse of circumstances, over which I had simply no control whatever.

Adelaide, Harry, and I went to the *Malkasten*. The gardens were gaily illuminated; there was a torchlight procession round the little artificial lake, and chorus-singing—merry choruses, such as *Wenn Zweie sich gut sind, sie finden den Weg*—which were cheered and laughed at. The fantastically-dressed artists and their friends were flitting, torch in hand, about the dark alleys under the great twisted acacias and elms, the former of which made the air voluptuous with their scent. Then we adjourned to the saal for the con-

cert, and heard on all sides regrets about the absence of Von Francius.

We sat out the first part of the festivities, which were to conclude with theatricals. During the pause we went again into the garden. The May evening was balmy and beautiful; no moonlight, but many stars, and the twinkling lights in the garden.

Adelaide and I had seated ourselves on a circular bench surrounding a big tree, which had the mighty word GOETHE cut deeply into its rugged bark. When the others began to return to the *Malkasten*, Adelaide, turning to Arkwright, said:

"Harry, will you go in and leave my sister and me here, that's a good boy? You can call for us when the play is over."

"All right, my lady," assented he amiably, and left us.

Presently Adelaide and I moved to another seat, near to a small table under a thick shade of trees. The pleasant, cool evening air fanned our faces; all was still and peaceful. Not a soul but ourselves had remained out of doors. The still drama of the marching

stars was less attractive than the amateur murdering of *Die Piccolomini* within. The tree-tops rustled softly over our heads. The lighted pond gleamed through the low-hanging boughs at the other end of the garden. A peal of laughter and a round of applause came wafted now and then from within. Ere long Adelaide's hand stole into mine, which closed over it, and we sat silent.

Then there came a voice. Some one—a complaisant *dilettantin*—was singing Thekla's song. We heard the refrain—distance lent enchantment; it sounded what it really was, deep as eternity:

"*Ich habe gelebt und geliebet.*"

Adelaide moved uneasily; her hand started nervously, and a sigh broke from her lips.

"Schiller wrote from his heart," said she in a low voice.

"Indeed, yes, Adelaide."

"Did you say good-bye to Von Francius, May, yesterday?"

"Yes—at least, we said *au revoir*. He wants me to sing for him next winter."

"Was he very down?"

"Yes—very. He——"

A footstep close at hand. A figure passed in the uncertain light, dimly discerned us, paused, and glanced at us.

"Max!" exclaimed Adelaide in a low voice, full of surprise and emotion, as she half started up.

"It *is* you! That is too wonderful!" said he, pausing.

"You are not yet gone?"

"I have been detained to-day. I leave early to-morrow. I thought I would take one last turn in the Malkasten garden, which I may perhaps never see or enter again. I did not know you were here."

"We—May and I—thought it so pleasant that we would not go in again to listen to the play."

Von Francius had come under the trees and was now leaning against a massive trunk; his slight, tall figure almost lost against it; his arms folded, and an imposing calm upon his pale face, which was just

caught by the gleam of a lamp outside the trees.

"Since this accidental meeting has taken place I may have the privilege of saying adieu to your ladyship."

"Yes—" said Adelaide in a strange, low, much-moved tone.

I felt uneasy, I was sorry this meeting had taken place. The shock and revulsion of feeling for Adelaide, after she had been securely calculating that Von Francius was a hundred miles on his way to —— was too severe. I could tell from the very *timbre* of her voice and its faint vibration how agitated she was, and as she seated herself again beside me, I felt that she trembled like a reed.

"It is more happiness than I had expected," went on Von Francius, and his voice too was agitated. Oh, if he would only say "Farewell," and go!

"Happiness!" echoed Adelaide in a tone whose wretchedness was too deep for tears.

"Ah! You correct me. Still it *is* a happiness; there are some kinds of joy which

one cannot distinguish from griefs, my lady, until one comes to think that one might have been without them, and then one knows their real nature."

She clasped her hands. I saw her bosom rise and fall with long, stormy breaths.

I trembled for both; for Adelaide, whose emotion and anguish were, I saw, mastering her; for Von Francius, because if Adelaide failed he must find it almost impossible to repulse her.

"Herr von Francius," said I in a quick, low voice, making one step towards him, and laying my hand upon his arm, "leave us! If you do love us," I added in a whisper, "leave us! Adelaide, say good-bye to him—let him go!"

"You are right," said Von Francius to me, before Adelaide had had time to speak; "you are quite right."

A pause. He stepped up to Adelaide. I dared not interfere. Their eyes met, and his will not to yield produced the same in her, in the shape of a passive, voiceless acquies-

cence in his proceedings. He took her hands, saying:

"My lady, adieu! Heaven send you peace, or death, which brings it, or—whatever is best."

Loosing her hands he turned to me, saying distinctly:

"As you are a woman, and her sister, do not forsake her now."

Then he was gone. She raised her arms and half fell against the trunk of the giant acacia beneath which we had been sitting; face forwards, as if drunk with misery.

Von Francius, strong and generous, whose very submission seemed to brace one to meet trouble with a calmer, firmer front, was gone. I raised my eyes, and did not even feel startled, only darkly certain that Adelaide's evil star was high in the heaven of her fate, when I saw, calmly regarding us, Sir Peter Le Marchant.

In another moment he stood beside his wife, smiling, and touched her shoulder: with a low cry she raised her face, shrinking away

from him. She did not seem surprised either, and I do not think people often are surprised at the presence, however sudden and unexpected, of their evil genius. It is good luck which surprises the average human being.

"You give me a cold welcome, my lady," he remarked. "You are so overjoyed to see me, I suppose. Your carriage is waiting outside. I came in it, and Arkwright told me I should find you here. Suppose you come home. We shall be less disturbed there than in these public gardens."

Tone and words all convinced me that he had heard most of what had passed, and would oppress her with it hereafter.

The late scene had apparently stunned her. After the first recoil she said, scarcely audibly, "I am ready," and moved. He offered her his arm; she took it, turning to me and saying, "Come, May!"

"Excuse me," observed Sir Peter, "you are better alone. I am sorry I cannot second your invitation to my charming sister-in-law.

I do not think you fit for *any* society—even hers."

"I cannot leave my sister, Sir Peter; she is not fit to be left," I found voice to say.

"She is not 'left,' as you say, my dear. She has her husband. She has *me*," said he.

Some few further words passed. I do not chronicle them. Sir Peter was as firm as a rock—that I was helpless before him is a matter of course. I saw my sister handed into her carriage; I saw Sir Peter follow her—the carriage drive away. I was left alone, half mad with terror at the idea of her state, to go home to my lodgings.

Sir Peter had heard the words of Von Francius to me: "do not forsake her now," and had given himself the satisfaction of setting them aside as if they had been so much waste paper. Von Francius was, as I well knew, trying to derive comfort in this very moment from the fact that I at least was with her; I who loved them both, and would have laid down my life for them. Well! let him have the comfort! In the

midst of my sorrow I rejoiced that he did not know the worst, and would not be likely to imagine for himself a terror grimmer than any feeling I had yet known.



CHAPTER VIII.

"Some say, 'A Queen discrowned,' and some call it 'Woman's shame.' Others name it 'A false step,' or 'social suicide,' just as it happens to strike their minds, or such understanding as they may be blessed with. In these days one rarely hears seriously mentioned such unruly words as 'Love,' or 'wretchedness,' or 'despair,' which may nevertheless be important factors in bringing about that result which stands out to the light of day for public inspection."

THE three days which I passed alone and in suspense were very terrible ones to me. I felt myself physically as well as mentally ill, and it was in vain that I tried to learn anything of or from Adelaide, and I waited in a kind of breathless eagerness for the end of it all,

for I knew as well as if some one had shouted it aloud from the house-tops, that that farewell in the *Malkasten* garden was not the end.

Early one morning, when the birds were singing, and the sunshine streaming into the room, Frau Lützler came into the room and put a letter into my hand, which she said a messenger had left. I took it, and paused a moment before I opened it. I was unwilling to face what I knew was coming—and yet, how otherwise could the whole story have ended?

"Dear May,

"You, like me, have been suffering during these three days. I have been trying —yes, I *have* tried to believe I could bear this life, but it is too horrible. Isn't it possible that sometimes it may be right to do wrong? It is of no use telling you what has passed, but it is enough. I believe I am only putting the crowning point to my husband's revenge when I leave him. He will be glad —he does not mind the disgrace for himself;

and he can get another wife, as good as I, when he wants one. When you read this, or not long afterwards, I shall be with Max von Francius. I wrote to him—I asked him to save me, and he said 'Come!' It is not because I *want* to go, but I *must* go somewhere. I have made a great mess of my life. I believe everybody does make a mess of it who tries to arrange things for himself. Remember that, May.

"I wonder if we shall ever meet again. Not likely, when you are married to some respectable, conventional man, who will shield you from contamination with such as I. I must not write more or I shall write nonsense. Good-bye, good-bye, good-bye! What will be the end of me? Think of me sometimes, and try not to think too hardly. Listen to your heart—not to what people say. Good-bye again!

"ADELAIDE."

I received this stroke without groan or cry, tear or shiver. It struck home to me. The heavens were riven asunder—a flash

came from them, descended upon my head, and left me desolate. I stood, I know not how long, stock-still, in the place where I had read that letter. In novels I had read of such things; they had had little meaning for me. In real life I had only heard them mentioned dimly and distantly, and here I was face to face with the awful thing, and so far from being able to deal out hearty, untempered condemnation, I found that the words of Adelaide's letter came to me like throes of a real heart. Bald, dry, disjointed sentences on the outside; without feeling they might seem, but to me they were the breathless exclamations of a soul in supreme torture and peril. My sister! with what a passion of love my heart went out to her. Think of you, Adelaide, and think of you not too hardly? Oh, why did not you trust me more?

I saw her as she wrote those words, "I have made a great mess of it." To make a mess of one's life—one mistake after another, till what might have been at least honest, pure, and of good report, becomes a stained,

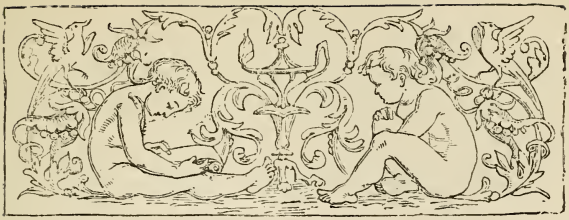
limp, unsightly thing, at which men feel that they may gaze openly, and from which women turn away in scorn unutterable; and that Adelaide, my proudest of proud sisters, had come to this!

I was not thinking of what people would say. I was not wondering how it had come about; I was feeling Adelaide's words ever more and more acutely, till they seemed to stand out from the paper and turn into cries of anguish in my very ears. I put my hands to my ears: I could not bear those notes of despair.

"What will be the end of me?" she said, and I shook from head to foot as I repeated the question. If her will and that of Von Francius ever came in contact. She had put herself at his mercy utterly: her whole future now depended upon the good pleasure of a man — and men were selfish.

With a faint cry of terror and foreboding, I felt everything whirl unsteadily around me: the letter fell from my hand; the icy band that had held me fast, gave way. All things

faded before me, and I scarcely knew that I was sinking upon the floor. I thought I was dying; then thought faded with the consciousness that brings it.



CHAPTER IX.

"Allein, allein! und so soll ich genesen?
Allein, allein! und das des Schicksals Segen!
Allein, allein! O Gott, ein einzig Wesen,
Um dieses Haupt an seine Brust zu legen!"

I HAD a sharp, if not a long attack of illness, which left me weak, shaken, passive, so that I felt neither ability nor wish to resist those who took me into their hands. I remember being surprised at the goodness of every one towards me; astonished at Frau Lützler's gentle kindness, amazed at the unfailing goodness of Doctor Mittendorf and his wife, at that of the medical man who attended me in my illness. Yes, the world seemed full of kindness, full of kind people who were

anxious to keep me in it, and who managed, in spite of my effort to leave it, to retain me.

Doctor Mittendorf, the oculist, had been my guardian angel. It was he who wrote to my friends and told them of my illness; it was he who went to meet Stella and Miss Hallam's Merrick, who came over to nurse me—and take me home. The fiat had gone forth. I was to go home. I made no resistance, but my very heart shrank away in fear and terror from the parting, till one day something happened which reconciled me to going home, or rather made me evenly and equally indifferent whether I went home, or stayed abroad, or lived, or died, or, in short, what became of me.

I sat one afternoon for the first time in an arm-chair opposite the window. It was June, and the sun streamed warmly and richly in. The room was scented with a bunch of wall-flowers and another of mignonette, which Stella had brought in that morning from the market. Stella was very kind to me, but in a superior, patronising way. I had always

felt deferentially backward before the superior abilities of both my sisters, but Stella quite overawed me by her decided opinions and calm way of setting me right upon all possible matters.

This afternoon she had gone out with Merrick to enjoy a little fresh air. I was left quite alone, with my hands in my lap, feeling very weak, and looking wistfully towards the well-remembered windows on the other side of the street.

They were wide open: I could see inside the room. No one was there—Friedhelm and Eugen had gone out, no doubt.

The door of my room opened, and Frau Lützler came in. She looked cautiously around, and then, having ascertained that I was not asleep, asked in a nerve-disturbing whisper if I had everything that I wanted.

"Everything, thank you, Frau Lützler," said I. "But come in! I want to speak to you. I am afraid I have given you no end of trouble."

"*Ach, ich bitte Sie,* Fräulein! Don't

mention the trouble. We have managed to keep you alive."

How they all did rejoice in having won a victory over that grey-winged angel, Death! I thought to myself, with a curious sensation of wonder.

"You are very kind," I said, "and I want you to tell me something, Frau Lützler; how long have I been ill?"

"Fourteen days, Fräulein; little as you may think it."

"Indeed. I have heard nothing about any one in that time. Who has been made *Musik-direktor* in place of Herr von Francius?"

Frau Lützler folded her arms and composed herself to tell me a history.

"*Ja, Fräulein,* the post *would* have been offered to Herr Courvoisier, only, you see, he has turned out a good-for-nothing. But perhaps you heard about that?"

"Oh yes! I know all about it," said I hastily, as I passed my handkerchief over my mouth to hide the spasm of pain which contracted it

"Of course, considering all that, *die Direktion* could not offer it to him, so they proposed it to Herr Helfen—you know Herr Helfen, Fräulein, *nicht?*"

I nodded.

"A good young man! a worthy young man, and so popular with his companions! *Aber denken Sie nur!* The authorities might have been offering him an insult instead of a good post. He refused it, then and there; would not stop to consider about it—in fact, he was quite angry about it. The gentleman who was chosen at last was a stranger, from Hanover."

"Herr Helfen refused it—why, do you know?"

"They say, because he was so fond of Herr Courvoisier, and would not be set above him. It may be so. I know for a certainty that, so far from taking part against Herr Courvoisier, he would not even *believe* the story against him, though he could not deny it, and did not try to deny it. *Aber, Fräulein*—what hearts men must have! To have lived here three years, and let the world

think him an honest man, when all the time he had *that* on his conscience! *Schrecklich!*"

Adelaide and Courvoisier, it seemed, might almost be pelted with the same stones.

"His wife, they say, died of grief at the disgrace——"

"Yes," said I, wincing. I could not bear this any longer, nor to discuss Courvoisier with Frau Lützler, and the words "his wife," uttered in that speculatively gossiping tone, repelled me. She turned the subject to Helfen again.

"Herr Helfen must indeed have loved his friend, for when Herr Courvoisier went away he went with him."

"Herr Courvoisier is gone?" I inquired, in a voice so like my usual one that I was surprised.

"Yes, certainly he is gone. I don't know where, I am sure."

"Perhaps they will return?"

Frau Lützler shook her head, and smiled slightly.

"*Nee, Fräulein!* Their places were filled immediately. They are gone—*ganz und gar.*"

I tried to listen to her, tried to answer her as she went on giving her opinions upon men and things, but the effort collapsed suddenly. I had at last to turn my head away, and close my eyes, and in that weary, weary moment I prayed to God that He would let me die, and wondered again, and was almost angry with those who had nursed me, for having done their work so well. "We have managed to save you," Frau Lützler had said. Save me from what, and for what?

I knew the truth, as I sat there; it was quite too strong and too clear to be laid aside, or looked upon with doubtful eyes. I was fronted by a fact, humiliating or not—a fact which I could not deny.

It was bad enough to have fallen in love with a man who had never showed me by word or sign that he cared for me, but exactly and pointedly the reverse: but now

it seemed the man himself was bad too. Surely a well-regulated mind would have turned away from him—uninfluenced.

If so, then mine was an ill-regulated mind. I had loved him from the bottom of my heart: the world without him felt cold, empty and bare—desolate to live in, and shorn of its sweetest pleasures. He *had* influenced me; he influenced me yet—I still felt the words true:

> "The *greater* soul that draweth thee
> Hath left his shadow plain to see
> On thy fair face, Persephone!"

He had bewitched me: I did feel capable of "making a fool of myself" for his sake. I did feel that life by the side of any other man would be miserable, though never so richly set; and that life by his side would be full and complete though never so poor and sparing in its circumstances. I make no excuses, no apologies for this state of things. It simply was so.

Gone! and Friedhelm with him! I should probably never see either of them again. "I have made a mess of my life,"

Adelaide had said, and I felt that I might chant the same dirge. A fine ending to my boasted artistic career! I thought of how I had sat and chattered so aimlessly to Courvoisier in the cathedral at Köln, and had little known how large and how deep a shadow his influence was to cast over my life.

I still retained a habit of occasionally kneeling by my bedside and saying my prayers, and this night I felt the impulse to do so. I tried to thank God for my recovery. I said the Lord's Prayer: it is an universal petition and thanksgiving; it did not too nearly touch my woes; it allowed itself to be said, but when I came to something nearer, tried to say a thanksgiving for blessings and friends who yet remained, my heart refused, my tongue clave to my mouth. Alas! I was not regenerate. I could not thank God for what had happened. I found myself thinking of "the pity on't," and crying most bitterly till tears streamed through my folded fingers, and whispering, "Oh, if I could only have died while I was so ill! no one would

have missed me, and it would have been so *much* better for me!"

In the beginning of July, Stella, Merrick, and I returned to England, to Skernford, *home.* I parted in silent tears from my trusted friends, the Mittendorfs, who begged me to come and stay with them at some future day. The anguish of leaving Elberthal did not make itself fully felt at first—that remained to torment me at a future day. And soon after our return came printed in large type in all the newspapers, "Declaration of War between France and Germany." Mine was amongst the hearts which panted and beat with sickening terror in England while the dogs of war were fastened in deadly grip abroad.

My time at home was spent more with Miss Hallam than in my own home. I found her looking much older, much feebler, and much more subdued than when she had been in Germany. She seemed to find some comfort from my society, and I was glad to devote myself to her. But for her I should

never have known all those pains and pleasures which, bitter though their remembrance might be, were, and ever would be to me, the dearest thing of my life.

Miss Hallam seemed to know this; she once asked me, "Would I return to Germany if I could?"—"Yes," said I, "I would."

To say that I found life dull, even in Skernford, at *that* time, would be untrue. Miss Hallam was a furious partisan of the French, and I dared not mention the war to her, but I took in the *Daily News* from my private funds, and read it in my bedroom every night with dimmed eyes, fast-coming breath, and beating heart. I knew—knew well that Eugen must be fighting—unless he were dead. And I knew, too, by some intuition founded, I suppose, on many small negative evidences unheeded at the time, that he would fight, not like the other men who were battling for the sake of hearth and home, and sheer love and pride for Fatherland, but as one who has no home and no Fatherland, as one who seeks a grave, not as one who combats a wrong.

Stella saw the pile of newspapers in my room, and asked me how I could read those dreary accounts of battles and bombardments. Beyond these poor newspapers I had, during the sixteen months that I was at home, but scant tidings from without. I had implored Clara Steinmann to write to me now and then, and tell me news of Elberthal, but her penmanship was of the most modest and retiring description, and she was, too, so desperately excited about Karl as to be able to think of scarce anything else. Karl belonged to a *Landwehr* regiment which had not yet been called out, but to which that frightful contingency might happen any day; and what should she, Clara, do in that case? She told me no news; she lamented over the possibility of Karl's being summoned upon active service. It was, she said, *grausam, schrecklich!* It made her almost faint to write about it, and yet did she compose four whole pages in that condition. The barrack, she informed me, was turned into a hospital, and she and "Tante" both worked hard. There was much work—dreadful work to

do—such poor groaning fellows to nurse! "*Herrgott!*" cried poor little Clara, "I did not know that the world was such a dreadful place!" Everything was so dear, so frightfully dear, and Karl—that was the burden of her song—might have to go into battle any day.

Also through the public papers I learnt that Adelaide and Sir Peter Le Marchant were divided for ever. As to what happened afterwards I was for some time in uncertainty, longing most intensely to know, not daring to speak of it. Adelaide's name was the signal for a cold stare from Stella, and angry, indignant expostulation from Miss Hallam. To me it was a sorrowful spell which I carried in my heart of hearts.

One day I saw in a German musical periodical which I took in, this announcement: "Herr Musik-direktor Max von Francius in —— has lately published a new Symphonie in B minor. The productions of this gifted composer are slowly but most surely making the mark which they deserve to leave in the musical history of our nation: he has,

we believe, left —— for —— for a few weeks to join his lady (*seine Gemahlin*), who is one of the most active and valuable of the hospital nurses of that town, now, alas! little else than a hospital."

This paragraph set my heart beating wildly. Adelaide was then the wife of Von Francius. My heart yearned from my solitude towards them both. Why did not they write? They knew how I loved them. Adelaide could not suppose that I looked upon her deed with the eyes of the world at large—with the eyes of Stella or of Miss Hallam. Had I not grieved with her? Had I not seen the dreadful struggle? Had I not proved the nobility of Von Francius? On an impulse I seized pen and paper, and wrote to Adelaide, addressing my letter under cover to her husband at the town in which he was Musik-direktor. To him I also wrote—only a few words—"Is your pupil forgotten by her master? he has never been forgotten by her."

At last an answer came. On the part of Adelaide it was short:

"DEAR MAY,

"I have had no time till now to answer your letter. I cannot reply to all your questions. You ask whether I repent what I have done. I repent my whole life. If I am happy—how can I be happy? I am busy now, and have many calls upon my time. My husband is very good: he never interposes between me and my work. Shall I ever come to England again?—never.

"Yours,

"A. VON F."

No request to write again! No inquiry after friends or relations! This letter showed me that whatever *I* might feel to her—however my heart might beat and long, how warm soever the love I bore her, yet that Adelaide was now apart from me—divided in very thought. It was a cruel letter, but in my pain I could not but see that it had not been cruelly intended. Her nature had changed. But behind this pain lay comfort. On the back of the same sheet as that on which

Adelaide's curt epistle was written, were some lines in the hand I knew well.

"LIEBE MAI" (they said),

"Forgive your master, who can never forget you, nor ever cease to love you. You suffer. I know it: I read it in those short, constrained lines, so unlike your spontaneous words and frank smile. My dear child, remember the storms that are beating on every side—over our country, in our hearts. Once I asked you to sing for me sometime: you promised. When the war is over I shall remind you of your promise. At present, believe me, silence is best.

"Your old music-master,

"M. v. F."

Gall and honey, roses and thistles, a dagger at the heart and a caress upon the lips; such seemed to me the characters of the two letters on the same sheet which I held in my hand. Adelaide made my heart ache; Von Francius made tears stream from my eyes. I reproached myself for having doubted him,

but oh, I treasured the proof that he was true! It was the one tangible link between me, reality, and hard facts, and the misty yet beloved life I had quitted. My heart was full to overflowing; I must tell some one—I must speak to some one.

Once again I tried to talk to Stella about Adelaide, but she gazed at me in that straight, strange way, and said coldly that she preferred not to speak of "that." I could not speak to Miss Hallam about it. Alone in the broad meadows, beside the noiseless river, I sometimes whispered to myself that I was not forgotten, and tried to console myself with the feeling that what Von Francius promised he did—I should touch his hand, hear his voice again—and Adelaide's. For the rest, I had to lock the whole affair—my grief and my love, my longing and my anxiety, fast within my own breast, and did so.

It was a long lesson—a hard one; it was conned with bitter tears, wept long and alone in the darkness; it was a sorrow which lay down and rose up with me. It taught (or rather practised me until I became expert in

them) certain things in which I had been deficient; reticence, self-reliance, a quicker ability to decide in emergencies. It certainly made me feel old and sad, and Miss Hallam often said that Stella and I were "as quiet as nuns."

Stella had the power which I so ardently coveted: she was a first-rate instrumentalist. The only topic she and I had in common was the music I had heard and taken part in. To anything concerning that she would listen for hours.

Meanwhile the war rolled on, and Paris capitulated, and peace was declared. The spring passed and Germany laughed in glee, and bleeding France roused herself to look with a haggard eye around her; what she saw was, as we all know, desolation, and mourning, and woe. And summer glided by, and autumn came, and I did not write either to Adelaide or Von Francius. I had a firm faith in him—an absolute trust. I felt I was not forgotten.

In less than a year after my return to England, Miss Hallam died. The day before

her death she called me to her, and said words which moved me very much.

"May, I am an eccentric old woman, and lest you should be in any doubt upon the subject of my feelings towards you, I wish to tell you that my life has been more satisfactory to me ever since I knew you."

"That is much more praise than I deserve, Miss Hallam."

"No, it isn't. I like both you and Stella. Three months ago I made a codicil to my will by which I endeavoured to express that liking. It is nothing very brilliant, but I fancy it will suit the views of both of you."

Utterly astounded, I stammered out some incoherent words.

"There, don't thank me," said she. "If I were not sure that I shall die to-morrow—or thereabouts, I should put my plan into execution at once, but I shall not be alive at the end of the week."

Her words proved true. Grim, sardonic, and cynical to the last, she died quietly, gladly closing her eyes which had so long

been sightless. She was sixty-five years old, and had lived alone since she was five and twenty.

The codicil to her will, which she had spoken of with so much composure, left three hundred pounds a year to Stella and me. She wished a portion of it to be devoted to our instruction in music, vocal and instrumental, at any German *Conservatorium* we might select. She preferred that of L——. Until we were of age, our parents or guardians saw to the dispensing of the money, after that it was our own — half belonging to each of us; we might either unite our funds or use them separately as we chose.

It need scarcely be said that we both chose that course which she had indicated. Stella's joy was deep and intense—mine had an unavoidable sorrow mingled with it. At the end of September, 18—, we departed for Germany, and before going to L—— it was agreed that we should pay a visit, at Elberthal, to my friend Doctor Mittendorf.

It was a gusty September night, with wind

dashing angrily about and showers of rain flying before the gale, on which I once again set foot in Elberthal—the place I had thought never more to see.



BOOK VI.

ROTHENFELS.

CHAPTER I.

"Freude trinken alle Wesen
An den Brüsten der Natur;
Alle Guten, alle Bösen
Folgen ihrer Rosenspur."

I FELT a deep rapture in being once more in that land where my love, if he did not live, slept. But I forbear to dwell on that rapture, much as it influenced me. It waxes tedious when put into words—loses colour and flavour, like a pressed flower.

I was at first bitterly disappointed to find that Stella and I were only to have a few days in Elberthal. Doctor Mittendorf no longer lived there; but only had his official residence in the town, going every week-end to his country house, or "Schloss," as he ambitiously called it, at Lahnburg, a four hours' railway journey from Elberthal.

Frau Mittendorf, who had been at Elberthal on a visit, was to take Stella and me with her to Lahnburg on the Tuesday morning after our arrival, which was on a Friday evening.

The good Doctor's Schloss, an erection built like the contrivances of the White Knight in "Through the Looking Glass," on "a plan of his own invention," had been his pet hobby for years, and now that it was finished, he invited every invitable person to come and stay at it.

It was not likely that he would excuse a person for whom he had so much regard as he professed for me, from the honour, and I was fain to conceal the fact that I would much rather have remained in Elberthal,

and make up my mind to endure as well as I could the prospect of being buried in the country with Frau Mittendorf and her children.

* * * * *

It was Sunday afternoon. An equinoctial gale was raging, or rather had been raging all day. It had rained incessantly, and the wind had howled. The skies were cloud-laden, the wind was furious. The Rhine was so swollen that the streets in the lower part of the town sloping to the river were under water, and the people going about in boats.

But I was tired of the house; the heated rooms stifled me. I was weary of Frau Mittendorf's society, and thoroughly dissatisfied with my own.

About five in the afternoon I went to the window and looked out. I perceived a strip of pale, watery blue through a rift in the storm-laden clouds, and I chose to see that, and that only, ignoring the wind-lashed trees of the Allée; the leaves, wet and sodden and

sere, hurrying panic-stricken before the gale, ignoring, too, the low wail promising a coming hurricane, which sighed and soughed beneath the wind's shrill scream.

There was a temporary calm, and I bethought myself that I would go to church—*not* to the Protestant church attended by the English clique—heaven forbid! but to my favourite haunt, the *Jesuiten Kirche.*

It was just the hour at which service would be going on. I asked Stella in a low voice if she would not like to come; she declined with a look of pity at me, so, notifying my intention to Frau Mittendorf, and mildly but firmly leaving the room before she could utter any remonstrance, I rushed upstairs, clothed myself in my winter mantle, threw a shawl over my arm, and set out.

The air was raw, but fresh; life-giving and invigorating. The smell of the stove, which clung to me still, was quickly dissipated by it. I wrapped my shawl around me, turned down a side street, and was soon in the heart of the old part of the town, where all the

Roman Catholic churches were, the quarter lying near the river and wharves, and bridge of boats.

I liked to go to the *Jesuiten Kirche*, and placing myself in the background, kneel as the others knelt, and without taking part in the service, think my own thoughts and pray my own prayers.

Here none of the sheep looked wolfish at you unless you kept to a particular pen, for the privilege of sitting in which you paid so many marks *per quartal* to a respectable functionary, who came to collect them. Here the men came and knelt down, cap in hand, and the women seemed really to be praying, and aware of what they were praying for, not looking over their prayer-books at each other's clothes.

I entered the church. Within the building it was already almost dark. A reddish light burnt in a great glittering censer, which swung gently to and fro in the chancel.

There were many people in the church, kneeling in groups and rows, and all occupied with their prayers. I, too, knelt down, and

presently as the rest sat up I sat up too. A sad-looking monk had ascended the pulpit, and was beginning to preach. His face was thin, hollow, and ascetic-looking; his eyes blazed bright from deep, sunken sockets. His cowl came almost up to his ears. I could dimly see the white cord round his waist as he began to preach, at first in a low and feeble voice, which gradually waxed into power.

He was in earnest—whether right or wrong he was in earnest. I listened with the others to what he said. He preached the beauties of renunciation, and during his discourse quoted the very words which had so often haunted me—*Entbehren sollst du! sollst entbehren!*

His earnestness moved me deeply. His voice was musical, sweet. His accent made the German burr soft; he was half Italian. I had been at the Instrumental Concert the previous night, for old associations' sake, and they had played the two movements of Schubert's unfinished Symphony—the B. Minor. The refrain in the last movement haunted me —a refrain of seven cadences, which rises

softly and falls, dies away, is carried softly from one instrument to another, wanders afar, returns again, sinks lower and lower, deeper and deeper, till at last the *Celli* (if I mistake not) take it up for the last time, and the melody dies a beautiful death, leaving you undecided whether to weep or smile, but penetrated through and through with its dreamy loveliness.

This exquisite refrain lingered in my memory and echoed in my mind, like a voice from some heavenly height, telling me to rest and be at peace, in time to the swinging of the censer, in harmony with the musical southern voice of that unknown Brother Somebody.

By degrees I began to think that the censer did not sway so regularly, so like a measured pendulum as it had done, but was moving somewhat erratically, and borne upon the gale came a low, ominous murmur, which first mingled itself with the voice of the preacher, and then threatened to dominate it. Still the refrain of the Symphonie rang in my ears, and I was

soothed to rest by the inimitable nepenthe of music.

But the murmur of which I had so long been, as it were, half-conscious, swelled, and drove other sounds and the thoughts of them from my mind. It grew to a deep, hollow roar—a very hurricane of a roar. The preacher's voice ceased, drowned.

I think none of us were at first certain about what was happening; we only felt that something tremendous was going on. Then, with one mighty bang and blow of the tempest, the door by which I had entered the church was blown bodily in, and fell crashing upon the floor; and after that the hurricane came rushing through the church with the howl of a triumphant demon, and hurried round the building, extinguishing every light, and turning a temple of God into Hades.

Sounds there were as of things flapping from the walls, as of wood falling; but all was in pitchiest darkness—a very "darkness which might be felt." Amid the roar of the wind came disjointed, broken exclamations of terrified women and angry, impatient men.

"*Ach Gott!*" "*Du meine Zeit!*" "*Herr du meine Güte!*" "*Oh je!*" etc., rang all round, and hurrying people rushed past me, making confusion worse confounded, as they scrambled past to try and get out.

I stood still, not from any bravery or presence of mind, but rather from the utter annihilation of both qualities in the shock and the surprise of it all. At last I began trying to grope my way towards the door. I found it. Some people—I heard and felt rather than saw—were standing about the battered-in door, and there was the sound of water hurrying past the doorway. The Rhine was rushing down the street.

"We must go to the other door—the west door," said some one amongst the people; and as the group moved I moved too, beginning to wish myself well out of it.

We reached the west door; it led into a small lane or *gasse*, regarding the geography of which I was quite at sea, for I had only been in it about once before. I stepped from the street into the lane, which was in the very blackness of darkness, and seemed to be filled

with a wind and a hurricane which one could almost distinguish and grasp.

The roar of wind and the surging of water were all around, and were deafening. I followed, as I thought, some voices which I heard, but scarcely knew where I was going, as the wind seemed to be blowing all ways at once, and there came to me an echo here and an echo there, misleading rather than guiding. In a few moments I felt my foot upon wood, and there was a loud creaking and rattling, as of chains, a groaning, splitting, and great uproar going on, as well as a motion as if I were on board a ship.

After making a few steps I paused. It was utterly impossible that I could have got upon a boat—wildly impossible. I stood still, then went on a few steps. Still the same extraordinary sounds—still such a creaking and groaning—still the rush, rush, and swish, swish of water; but not a human voice any more, not a light to be seen, not a sign!

With my hat long since stripped from my head and launched into darkness and space, my hair lashed about me in all

directions, my petticoats twisted round me like ropes, I was utterly and completely bewildered by the thunder and roar of all around. I no longer knew which way I had come nor where to turn. I could not imagine where I was, and my only chance seemed to be to hold fast and firm to the railing against which the wind had unceremoniously banged me.

The creaking grew louder—grew into a crash; there was a splitting of wood, a snapping of chains, a kind of whirl, and then I felt the wind blow upon me, first from this side, then from that, and became conscious that the structure upon which I stood was moving—floating smoothly and rapidly upon water. In an instant (when it was too late) it all flashed upon my mind. I had wandered upon the *Schiffbrücke,* or bridge of boats which crossed the Rhine from the foot of the market-place, and this same bridge had been broken by the strength of the water and wind, and upon a portion of it I was now floating down the river.

With my usual wisdom, and "the shrewd application of a wide experience so peculiar

to yourself," as some one has since insulted me by saying, I instantly gave myself up as lost. The bridge would run into some other bridge, or dash into a steamer, or do something horrible, and I should be killed, and none would know my fate; or it would all break into little pieces, and I should have to cling to one of them, and should inevitably be drowned.

In any case, my destruction was only a matter of time. How I loved my life then! How sweet, and warm, and full, and fresh it seemed! How cold the river, and how undesirable a speedy release from the pomps and vanities of this wicked world!

The wind was still howling horribly—chanting my funeral dirge. Like grim death, I held on to my railing, and longed, with a desperate longing, for one glimpse of light.

I had believed myself alone upon my impromptu raft—or rather, it had not occurred to me that there might be another than myself upon it; but at this instant, in a momentary lull of the wind, almost by my side I heard a sound that I knew well, and had

cause to remember—the tune of the wild March from *Lenore*, set to the same words, sung by the same voice as of yore.

My heart stood still for a moment, then leaped on again. Then a faint, sickly kind of dread overcame me. I thought I was going out of my mind—was wandering in some delusion, which took the form of the dearest voice, and sounded with its sound in my ears.

But no. The melody did not cease. As the beating of my heart settled somewhat down, I still heard it—not loud, but distinct. Then the tune ceased. The voice—ah! there was no mistaking *that*, and I trembled with the joy that thrilled me as I heard it—conned over the words as if struck with their weird appropriateness to the scene, which was certainly marked :

> "Und das Gesindel, husch, husch, husch !
> Kam hinten nachgeprasselt—
> Wie Wirbelwind am Haselbusch
> Durch dürre Blätter rasselt."

And *Wirbelwind*, the whirlwind, played a wild accompaniment to the words.

It seemed to me that a long time passed, during which I could not speak, but could only stand with my hands clasped over my heart, trying to steady its tumultuous beating. I had not been wrong, thank the good God above! I had not been wrong when my heart sang for joy at being once more in this land. He was here—he was living—he was safe!

Here were all my worst fears soothed—my intensest longings answered without my having spoken. It was now first that I really knew how much I loved him—so much, that I felt almost afraid of the strength of the passion. I knew not till now how it had grown—how vast and all-dominating it had become.

A sob broke from my lips, and his voice was silenced.

"Herr Courvoisier!" I stammered.

"Who spoke?" he asked in a clear voice.

"It *is* you!" I murmured.

"May!" he uttered, and paused abruptly.

A hand touched mine—warm, firm, strong

—his very hand. In its lightest touch there seemed safety, shelter, comfort.

"Oh, how glad I am! how glad I am!" I sobbed.

He murmured "*Sonderbar!*" as if arguing with himself, and I held his hand fast.

"Don't leave me! Stay here!" I implored.

"I suppose there is not much choice about that for either of us," said he, and he laughed.

I did not remember to wonder how he came there; I only knew he *was* there. That tempest, which will not soon be forgotten in Elberthal, subsided almost as rapidly as it had arisen. The winds lulled as if a wizard had bidden them be still. The gale hurried on to devastate fresh fields and pastures new. There was a sudden reaction of stillness, and I began to see in the darkness the outlines of a figure beside me. I looked up. There was no longer that hideous, driving black mist, like chaos embodied, between me and heaven. The sky, though dark, was clear; some stars were gleaming

coldly down upon the havoc which had taken place since they last viewed the scene.

Seeing the heavens so calm and serene, a sudden feeling of shyness and terror overtook me. I tried to withdraw my hand from that of my companion, and to remove myself a little from him. He held my hand fast.

"You are exhausted with standing?" said he. "Sit down upon this ledge."

"If you will too."

"Oh, of course. I think our voyage will be a long one, and——"

"Speak German!" said I. "Let me hear you speaking it again."

"And I have no mind to stand all the time," he concluded in his own tongue.

"Is there no one else here but ourselves."

"No one."

I had seated myself and he placed himself beside me. I was in no laughing mood or I might have found something ludicrous in our situation.

"I wonder where we are now," I half whispered, as the bridge was still hurried ceaselessly down the dark and rushing river. I *dared* not allude to anything else. I felt my heart too full—I felt too, too utterly uncertain of him. There was sadness in his voice. I, who knew its every cadence could hear that.

"I think we are about passing Kaiserswerth," said he. "I wonder where we shall land at last."

"Do you think we shall go very far?"

"Perhaps we may. It is on record that the Elberthal Boat Bridge—part of it I mean—once turned up at Rotterdam. It may happen again, *warum nicht?*"

"How long does that take?"

"Twelve or fourteen hours, I dare say."

I was silent.

"I am sorry for you," he said in the gentlest of voices, as he happed my shawl more closely around me. "And you are cold too—shivering. My coat must do duty again."

"No, *no!*" cried I. "Keep it! I won't have it."

"Yes you will, because you can't help it if I make you," he answered as he wrapped it round me.

"Well, please take part of it. At least wrap half of it round you," I implored, "or I shall be so miserable."

"Pray don't. No, keep it! It is like charity—it has not room for many sins at once."

"Do you mean you or me?" I could not help asking.

"Are we not all sinners?"

I knew it would be futile to resist, but I was not happy in the new arrangement, and I touched his coat-sleeve timidly.

"You have quite a thin coat," I remonstrated, "and I have a winter dress, a thick jacket, and a shawl."

"And my coat, *und doch bist du*—oh, pardon! and you are shivering in spite of it," said he conclusively.

"It is an awful storm, is it not?" I suggested next.

"*Was* an awful storm, *nicht wahr?* Yes. And how very strange that you and I, of all people, should have met here, of all places. How did you get here?"

"I had been to church."

"So! I had not."

"How did *you* come here?" I ventured to ask.

"Yes—you may well ask; but first—you have been in England, have you not?"

"Yes, and am going back again."

"Well—I came here yesterday from Berlin. When the war was over——"

"Ah, you were in the war?" I gasped.

"*Natürlich, mein Fräulein.* Where else should I have been?"

"And you fought?"

"Also *natürlich.*"

"Where did you fight? At Sedan?"

"At Sedan—yes."

"Oh, my God!" I whispered to myself. "And were you wounded?" I added aloud.

"A mere trifle. Friedhelm and I had the luck to march side by side. I learnt to know

in spirit and in letter the meaning of *Ich hatt' einen guten Camaraden.*"

"You were wounded!" I repeated, unheeding all that discursiveness. "Where? How? Were you in hospital?"

"Yes. Oh, it is nothing. Since then I have been learning my true place in the world, for you see, unluckily, I was not killed."

"Thank God! Thank God! How I have wondered! How I have thought—well, how did you come here?"

"I *coveted* a place in one of those graves, and couldn't have it," he said bitterly. "It was a little thing to be denied, but fallen men must do without much. I saw boys falling around me, whose mothers and sisters are mourning for them yet."

"Oh, don't."

"Well — Friedel and I are working in Berlin. We shall not stay there long; we are wanderers now! There is no room for us. I have a short holiday, and I came to spend it at Elberthal. This evening I set out, intending to hear the opera—*Der*

Fliegende Holländer — very appropriate, wasn't it ?"

" Very !"

" But the storm burst over the theatre just as the performance was about to begin, and removed part of the roof, upon which one of the company came before the curtain and dismissed us with his blessing and the announcement that no play would be played to-night. Thus I was deprived of the ungodly pleasure of watching my old companions wrestling with Wagner's stormy music while I looked on like a gentleman."

He laughed again—a harsh laugh, utterly unlike the old sweet tones—a laugh that roused all my fears to renewed strength.

" But when you came out of the theatre ?"

" When I came out of the theatre the storm was so magnificent, and was telling me so much that I resolved to come down to its centre-point and see *Vater Rhein* in one of his grandest furies. I strayed upon the bridge of boats ; forgot where I was, listened only to the storm ; ere I knew what was

happening I was adrift and the tempest howling round me—and you, fresh from your devotions to lull it."

"Are you going to stay long in Elberthal?"

"It seems I may not. I am driven away by storms and tempests."

"And me with you," thought I. "Perhaps there is some meaning in this. Perhaps Fate means us to breast other storms together. If so, I am ready—anything—so it be *with you.*"

"There's the moon," said he; "how brilliant, is she not?"

I looked up into the sky wherein she had indeed appeared "like a dying lady, lean and pale," shining cold and drear, but very clearly upon the swollen waters, showing us dim outlines of half-submerged trees, cottages and hedges—showing us that we were in mid-stream, and that other pieces of wreck were floating down the river with us, hurrying rapidly with the current—showing me, too, in a ghostly whiteness, the face of my companion turned towards me, as his elbow

rested on his knee and his chin in his hand, and his loose dark hair was blown back from his broad forehead; his strange, deep eyes were resting upon my face, calmly, openly.

Under that gaze my heart fell. In former days there had been in his face something not unakin to this stormy, free night; but now it was changed—*how* changed!

A year had wrought a terrible alteration. I knew not his past; but I did know that he had long been struggling, and a dread fear seized me that the struggle was growing too hard for him—his spirit was breaking. It was not only that the shadows were broader, deeper, more permanently sealed—there was a *down* look—a hardness and bitterness which inspired me both with pity and fear.

"Your fate is a perverse one," he remarked, as I did not speak.

"So! Why?"

"It throws you so provokingly into society which must be unpleasant to you."

"Whose society?"

"Mine, naturally."

"You are much mistaken," said I composedly.

"It is kind of you to say so. For your sake, I wish it had been any one but myself who had been thus thrown together with you. I promise you faithfully that as soon as ever we can land I will only wait to see you safely into a train and then I will leave you and——"

He was suddenly silenced. I had composed my face to an expression of indifference as stony as I knew how to assume, and with my hands folded in my lap, had steeled myself to look into his face and listen to him.

I could find nothing but a kind of careless mockery in his face—a hard half-smile upon his lips as he went on saying the hard things which cut home and left me quivering, and which he yet uttered as if they had been the most harmless pleasantries or the merest whipped-cream compliments.

It was at this moment that the wind, rising again in a brief spasm, blew a tress of

my loosened hair across his face. How it changed! flushed crimson. His lips parted —a strange, sudden light came into his eyes.

"I beg your pardon!" said I hastily, startled from my assumed composure, as I raised my hand to push my hair back. But he had gathered the tress together—his hand lingered for one moment—a scarcely perceptible moment—upon it, then he laid it gently down upon my shoulder.

"Then I will leave you," he went on, resuming the old manner, but with evident effort, "and not interfere with you any more."

What was I to think? What to believe? I thought to myself that had he been my lover and I had intercepted such a glance of his to another woman my peace of mind had been gone for evermore. But, on the other hand, every cool word he said gave the lie to his looks—or did his looks give the lie to his words? Oh that I could solve the problem once for all, and have done with it for ever!

"And you, Miss Wedderburn—have you deserted Germany?"

"I have been obliged to live in England, if that is what you mean—I am living in Germany at present."

"And Art—*die Kunst*—that is cruel!"

"You are amusing yourself at my expense, as you have always delighted in doing," said I sharply, cut to the quick.

"*Aber, Fräulein May!* What do you mean?"

"From the very first," I repeated, the pain I felt giving a keenness to my reproaches. "Did you not deceive me and draw me out for your amusement that day we met at Köln? You found out then, I suppose, what a stupid, silly creature I was, and you have repeated the process now and then, since—much to your own edification and that of Herr Helfen, I do not doubt. Whether it was just, or honourable, or *kind*, is a secondary consideration. Stupid people are only invented for the amusement of those who are not stupid."

"How dare you, how *dare* you talk in

that manner?" said he emphatically, laying his hand upon my shoulder, and somehow compelling my gaze to meet his. "But I know why—I read the answer in those eyes which dare everything, and yet——"

"Not quite everything," thought I uncomfortably, as the said eyes sank beneath his look.

"Fräulein May, will you have the patience to listen while I tell you a little story?"

"Oh yes!" I responded readily, as I hailed the prospect of learning something more about him.

"It is now nearly five years since I first came to Elberthal. I had never been in the town before. I came with my boy—may God bless him and keep him!—who was then two years old, and whose mother was dead—for my wife died early."

A pause, during which I did not speak. It was something so wonderful to me that he should speak to me of his wife.

"She was young—and very beautiful," said he. "You will forgive my introducing the subject?"

"Oh, Herr Courvoisier!"

"And I had wronged her. I came to Friedhelm Helfen, or rather was sent to him, and, as it happened, found such a friend as is not granted to one man in a thousand. When I came here, I was smarting under various griefs; about the worst was that I had recklessly destroyed my own prospects. I had a good career—a fair future open to me. I had cut short that career, annihilated that future, or any future worth speaking of, by—well, something had happened which divided me utterly and uncompromisingly and *for ever* from the friends, and the sphere, and the respect and affection of those who had been parents and brother and sister to me. *Then* I knew that their good opinion, their *love*, was my law and my highest desire. And it was not their fault—it was mine—my very own.

"The more I look back upon it all, the more I see that I have myself to thank for it. But that reflection, as you may suppose, does not add to the delights of a man's position when he is humbled to the dust as I

was then. Biting the dust—you have that phrase in English. Well, I have been biting the dust—yes, eating it, living upon it, and deservedly so, for five years; but nothing ever can, nothing ever will, make it taste anything but dry, bitter, nauseating to the last degree."

"Go on!" said I breathlessly.

"How kind you are to listen to the dull tale! Well, I had my boy Sigmund, and there were times when the mere fact that he was mine made me forget everything else, and thank my fate for the simple fact that I lived and was his father. His father—he was a part of myself, he could divine my every thought. But at other times, generally indeed, I was sick of life—*that* life. Don't suppose that I am one of those high-flown idiots who would make it out that no life is worth living: I knew and felt to my soul that the life from which I had locked myself out and then dropped the key as it were here in mid-stream, was a glorious life, worth living ten times over.

"There was the sting of it. For three

years I lived thus, and learnt a great deal, learnt what men in that position are—learnt to respect, admire, and love some of them—learnt to understand that man—*der Mensch*—is the same, and equally to be honoured everywhere. I also tried to grow accustomed to the thought, which grew every day more certain to me, that I must live on so for the future—to plan my life, and shape out a certain kind of repentance for sins past. I decided that the only form my atonement could take was that of self-effacement——"

"That is why you never would take the lead in anything."

"Exactly. I am naturally fond of leading. I love beyond everything to lead those who I know like me, and like following me. When I was *Haupt*—I mean, I knew that all that bygone mischief had arisen from doing what I *liked*, so I dropped doing what I liked, and began to do what I disliked. By the time I had begun to get a little into training, three years had passed—these things are not accomplished in a day, and the effects of twenty-seven years of selfishness are not

killed soon. I *was* killing them, and becoming a machine in the process.

"One year the Lower Rhenish *Musik-fest* was to be held at Köln. Long before it came off the Cologne orchestra had sent to us for contingents, and we had begun to attend some of the *Proben* regularly once or twice a week.

"One day Friedhelm and I had been at a Probe. The *Tower of Babel* and the *Lenore* Symphony were amongst the things we had practised. Both of them, the *Lenore* particularly, had got into my head. I broke loose for one day from routine, from drudgery and harness. It *was* a mistake. Friedhelm went off, shrugging his dear old shoulders, and I at last turned up, mooning at the Kölner *Bahnhof*. Well—you know the rest. Nay, do not turn so angrily away. Try to forgive a fallen man one little indiscretion. When I saw you I cannot tell what feeling stole warm and invigorating into my heart; it was something quite new—something I had never felt before: it was so sweet that I could not part with it. Fräulein May, I have

lived that afternoon over again many and many a time. Have *you* ever given a thought to it?"

"Yes, I have," said I dryly.

"My conduct after that arose half from pride—wounded pride, I mean, for when you cut me, it *did* cut me—I own it. Partly it arose from a worthier feeling—the feeling that I could not see very much of you or learn to know you at all well without falling very deeply in love with you. You hide your face—you are angry at that——"

"Stop! Did you never throughout all this give a thought to the possibility that *I* might fall in love with *you?*"

I did not look at him, but he said, after a pause:

"I *had* the feeling that if I tried I could win your love. I never was such a presumptuous fool as to suppose that you would love me unasked—or even with much asking on my part—*bewahre!*"

I was silent, still concealing my face. He went on:

"Besides, I knew that you were an English lady. I asked myself what was the right thing to do, and I decided that though you would consider me an ill-mannered, churlish clown, I would refuse those gracious, charming advances which you in your charity made. Our paths in life were destined to be utterly apart and divided, and what could it matter to *you*—the behaviour of an insignificant fiddler? You would forget him just when he deserved to be forgotten, that is—instantly.

"Time went on. You lived near us. Changes took place. Those who had a right to arbitrate for me, since I had by my own deed deprived myself of that right, wrote to me and demanded my son. I had shown myself incapable of managing my own affairs —was it likely that I could arrange his? And then he was better away from such a black sheep. It is true. The black sheep gave up the white lambling into the care of a legitimate shepherd, who carried it off to a correct and appropriate fold. Then life was empty indeed, for, strange though it may

seem, even black sheep have feelings—ridiculously out of place they are, too."

"Oh, don't speak so hardly!" said I tremulously, laying my hand for an instant upon his.

His face was turned towards me; his mien was severe, but serene; he spoke as of some far-past, distant dream.

"Then it was that in looking round my darkened horizon for Sigmund, I found that it was not empty. *You* rose trembling upon it like a star of light, and how beautiful a star! But there! do not turn away. I will not shock you by expatiating upon it. Enough that I found what I had more than once suspected—that I loved you. Once or twice I *nearly* made a fool of myself; that Carnival Monday—do you remember? Luckily Friedel and Karl came in, but in my saner moments I worshipped you as a noble, distant, good—part of the beautiful life which I had gambled with—and lost. Be easy! I never for one instant aspired to you—never thought of possessing you: I was not *quite* mad. I am only telling you this to explain, and——"

"And you renounced me?" said I in a low voice.

"I renounced you."

I removed my hand from my eyes, and looked at him. His eyes, dry and calm, rested upon my face. His countenance was pale; his mouth set with a grave, steady sweetness.

Light rushed in upon my mind in a radiant flood—light and knowledge. I knew what was right; an unerring finger pointed it to me. I looked deep, deep into his sad eyes, read his innermost soul, and found it pure.

"They say you have committed a crime," said I.

"And I have not denied, cannot deny it," he answered, as if waiting for something further.

"You need not," said I. "It is all one to me. I want to hear no more about that. I want to know if your heart is mine."

The wind wuthered wearily; the water rushed. Strange, inarticulate sounds of the

night came fitfully across ear and sense, as he answered me :

"Yours and my honour's. What then ?"

"This," I answered, stooping, sweeping the loose hair from that broad, sad forehead, and pressing my lips upon it. "This : accept the gift or reject it. As your heart is mine, so mine is yours—for ever and ever."

A momentary silence, as I raised myself trembling, and stood aside; and the water rushed, and the storm-birds on untiring wing beat the sky and croaked of the gale.

Then he drew me to him, folded me to his breast without speaking, and gave me a long, tender, yearning kiss, with unspeakable love, little passion in it, fit seal of a love that was deeper and sadder than it was triumphant.

"Let me have a few moments of this," said he, "just a few moments, May. Let me believe that I may hold you to your noble, pitying words. Then I shall be my own master again."

Ignoring this hint, I laid my hands upon his arm, and eying him steadily, went on :

"But understand, the man I love must not be my servant. If you want to keep me you must be the master; I brook no feeble curb; no weak hand can hold me. You must rule, or I shall rebel; you must show the way, for I do not know it. I don't know whether you understand what you have undertaken."

"My dear, you are excited. Your generosity carries you away, and your divine, womanly pity and kindness. You speak without thinking. You will repent to-morrow."

"That is not kind nor worthy of you," said I. "I have thought about it for sixteen months, and the end of my thought has always been the same : I love Eugen Courvoisier, and if he had loved me I should have been a happy woman, and if—though I thought it too good to be true, you know—*if* he ever should tell me so, nothing in this world shall make me spoil our two lives by

cowardice. I will hold to him against the whole world."

"It is impossible, May," he said quietly, after a pause. "I wish you had never seen me."

"It is only impossible if you make it so."

"My sin found me out even here, in this quiet place, where I knew no one. It will find me out again. You—if ever you were married to me—would be pointed out as the wife of a man who had disgraced his honour in the blackest, foulest way. I must and will live it out alone."

"You shall *not* live it out alone," I said.

The idea that I could stand by him—the fact that he was not prosperous, not stainless before the world—that mine would be no ordinary flourishing, meaningless marriage, in which "for better, for worse," signifies nothing but better, no worse—all this poured strength on strength into my heart, and seemed to warm it and do it good.

"I will tell you your duty," said he.

"Your duty is to go home and forget me. In due time some one else will find you the loveliest and dearest being in the world——"

"Eugen! Eugen!" I cried, stabbed to the quick. "How *can* you? You cannot love me, or you could not coldly turn me over to some other man, some abstraction——"

"Perhaps if he were *not* an abstraction, I might not be able to do it," he said, suddenly clasping me to him, with a jealous movement. "No; I am sure I should not be able to do it. Nevertheless, while he yet is an abstraction, and because of that, I say, leave me!"

"Eugen, I do not love lightly!" I began with forced calm. "I do not love twice. My love for you—is not a mere fancy—I fought against it with all my strength; it mastered me in spite of myself—now I cannot tear it away. If you send me away it will be barbarous; away to be alone, to England again, when I love you with my whole soul. No one but a man—no one but you could have said such a thing. If you do," I added,

terror at the prospect overcoming me, "if you do I shall die—I shall *die*."

I could command myself no longer, but sobbed aloud.

"You will have to answer for it," I repeated; "but you will not send me away."

"What, in heaven's name, makes you love me so?" he asked, as if lost in wonder.

"I don't know. I cannot imagine," said I, with happy politeness. "It is no fault of mine." I took his hand in mine. "Eugen, look at me." His eyes met mine. They brightened as he looked at me. "That crime of which you were accused—you did not do it."

Silence.

"Look at me and say that you did," I continued.

Silence still.

"Friedhelm Helfen always said you had not done it. He was more loyal than I," said I contritely; "but," I added jealously, "he did not love you better than I, for I

loved you all the same even though I almost believed you had done it. Well, that is an easy secret to keep, because it is to your credit."

"That is just what makes it hard. If it were true, one would be anxious rather than not to conceal it; but as it is *not* true, don't you see? Whenever you see me suspected, it will be the impulse of your loyal, impetuous heart to silence the offender, and tell him he lies."

In my haste I had not seen this aspect of the question. It was quite a new idea to me. Yes, I began to see in truer proportions the kind of suffering he had suffered, the kind of trials he had gone through, and my breath failed at the idea. Yes, I saw what lay before me. When they pointed at him I must not say, "It is a lie; he is as honest as you." It was a solemn prospect. It overpowered me.

"You quail before that?" said he gently, after a pause.

"No; I realise it. I do not quail before it," said I firmly. "But," I added, looking

at him with a new element in my glance—that of awe—"do you mean that for five years you have effaced yourself thus, knowing all the while that you were not guilty?"

"It was a matter of the clearest duty—and honour," he replied, flushing and looking somewhat embarrassed.

"Of *duty!*" I cried, strangely moved. "If you did not do it, who did? Why are you silent?"

Our eyes met. I shall never forget that glance. It had the concentrated patience, love and pride and loyalty, of all the years of suffering past and—to come.

"May, that is the test for you! That is what I shrink from exposing you to, what I know it is wrong to expose you to. I cannot tell you. No one knows but I, and I shall never tell any one, not even you, if you become my other self and soul and thought. Now you know all."

He was silent.

"So *that* is the truth?" said I. "Thank you for telling it to me. I always *thought*

you were a hero; now I am sure of it. Oh, Eugen! how I *do* love you for this! And you need not be afraid. I have been learning to keep secrets lately. I shall help, not hinder you. Eugen, we will live it down together."

At last we understood each other. At last our hands clasped and our lips met upon the perfect union of feeling and purpose for all our future lives. All was clear between us, bright, calm; and *I*, at least, was supremely happy. How little my past looked now; how petty and insignificant all my former hopes and fears!

* * * * *

Dawn was breaking over the river. Wild and storm-beaten was the scene on which we looked. A huge waste of swollen waters around us, devastated villages, great piles of wreck on all sides; a watery sun casting pallid beams upon the swollen river. We were sailing Hollandwards upon a fragment of the bridge, and in the distance were the

spires and towers of a town gleaming in the sickly sun-rays. I stood up and gazed towards that town, and he stood by my side, his arm round my waist. My chief wish was that our sail could go on for ever.

"Do you know what is ringing in my ears, and will not leave my mind?" I asked.

"Indeed, no! You are a riddle and a mystery to me."

I hummed the splendid air from the Choral Symphony, the motif of the music to the choruses to "Joy" which follow.

"Ah!" said he, taking up its deep, solemn gladness, "you are right, May—quite right. There *is* a joy, if it be 'beyond the starry belt.'"

"I wonder what that town is?" I said after a pause.

"I am not sure, but I fancy it is Emmerich. I am sure I hope so."

Whatever the town, we were floating straight towards it. I suddenly thought of

my dream long ago, and told it to him, adding :

" I think *this* must have been the floating wreck to which you and I seemed clinging ; though I thought that all of the dream that was *going* to be fulfilled had already come to pass on that Carnival Monday afternoon."

The boat had got into one of the twisting currents, and was being propelled directly towards the town.

Eugen looked at me and laughed. I asked why.

" What for a lark ! as they say in your country."

" You are quite mistaken. *I* never heard such an expression. But *what* is such a lark ?"

" We have no hats : we want something to eat ; we must have tickets to get back to Elberthal, and I have just two thalers in my pocket—oh ! and a two-pfennige piece. I left my little all behind me."

" Hurrah ! At last you will be *compelled* to take back that three thalers ten."

We both laughed at this *jeu d'esprit* as if it had been something exquisitely witty; and I forgot my dishevelled condition in watching the sun rise over the broad river, in feeling our noiseless progression over it, and, above all, in the divine sense of oneness and harmony with him at my side—a feeling which I can hardly describe, utterly without the passionate fitfulness of the orthodox lover's rapture, but as if for a long time I had been waiting for some quality to make me complete, and had quietly waked to find it there, and the world understandable—life's riddle read.

Eugen's caresses were few, his words of endearment quiet; but I knew what they stood for; a love rooted in feelings deeper than those of sense, holier than mere earthly love—feelings which had taken root in adversity, had grown in darkness and "made a sunshine in a shady place"—feelings which in him had their full and noble growth, and beauty of development, but which it seems to be the aim of the fashionable education of this period as much as possible to do away

with—the feelings of chivalry, delicacy, reticence, manliness, modesty.

As we drew nearer the town, he said to me:

"In a few hours we shall have to part, May, for a time. While we are here alone, and you are uninfluenced, let me ask you something. This love of yours for me—what will it carry you through?"

"Anything, now that I am sure of yours for me."

"In short, you are firmly decided to be my wife sometime?"

"When you tell me you are ready for me," said I, putting my hand in his.

"And if I find it best to leave my Fatherland, and begin life quite anew?"

"Thy God is my God, and thy people are my people, Eugen."

"One other thing. How do you know that you *can* marry? Your friends——"

"I am twenty years old. In a year I can do as I like," said I composedly. "Surely we can stand firm and faithful for a year?"

He smiled, and it was a new smile—sweet, hopeful, if not merry.

With this silent expression of determination and trust, we settled the matter.



CHAPTER II.

"What's failure or success to me?
I have subdued my life to the one purpose."

EUGEN sent a telegram from Emmerich to Frau Mittendorf to reassure her as to my safety. At four in the afternoon we left that town, refreshed and re-hatted, to reach Elberthal at six.

I told Eugen that we were going away the next day, to stay a short time at a place called Lahnburg.

He started, and looked at me.

"Lahnburg!—I—when you are there—*nein, das ist*— You are going to Lahnburg?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"You will know why I ask if you go to Schloss Rothenfels?"

"Why?"

"I say no more, dear May. I will leave you to form your own conclusions. I have seen that this fair head could think wisely and well under trying circumstances enough. I am rather glad that you *are* going to Lahnburg."

"The question is—will you still be at Elberthal when I return?"

"I cannot say. We had better exchange addresses. I am at Frau Schmidt's again—my old quarters. I do not know when or how we shall meet again. I must see Friedhelm, and you—when you tell your friends, you will probably be separated at once and completely from me."

"Well, a year is not much out of our lives. How old are you, Eugen?"

"Thirty-two. And you?"

"Twenty and two months: then you are twelve years older than I. You were a schoolboy when I was born. What were you like?"

"A regular little brute, I should suppose, as they all are."

"When we are married," said I, "perhaps I may go on with my singing, and earn some more money by it. My voice will be worth something to me then."

"I thought you had given up art."

"Perhaps I shall see Adelaide," I added, "or, rather, I *will* see her." I looked at him rather inquiringly. To my relief he said:

"Have you not seen her since her marriage?"

"No; have you?"

"She was my angel nurse when I was lying in hospital at ——. Did you not know that she has the Iron Cross? And no one ever won it more nobly."

"Adelaide—your nurse—the Iron Cross!" I ejaculated. "Then *you* have seen her?"

"Seen her shadow to bless it."

"Do you know where she is now?"

"With her husband at ——. *She* told me that you were in England, and she gave me this."

He handed me a yellow, much-worn folded

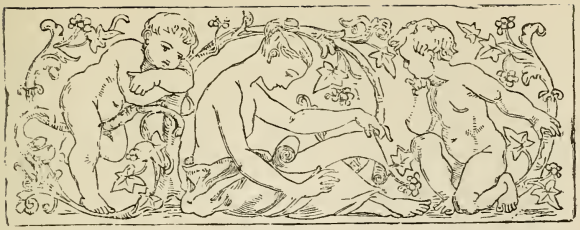
paper, which, on opening, I discovered to be my own letter to Adelaide, written during the war, and which had received so curt an answer.

"I begged very hard for it," said he, "and only got it with difficulty, but I represented that she might get more of them, whereas I——"

He stopped, for two reasons. I was weeping as I returned it to him, and the train rolled into the Elberthal station.

On my way to Dr. Mittendorf's I made up my mind what to do. I should not speak to Stella, nor to any one else of what had happened, but I should write very soon to my parents and tell them the truth. I hoped they would not refuse their consent, but I feared they would. I should certainly not attempt to disobey them while their authority legally bound me, but as soon as I was my own mistress, I should act upon my own judgment. I felt no fear of anything; the one fear of my life—the loss of Eugen—had been removed, and all others dwindled to nothing. My happiness, I am and was well

aware, was quite set upon things below; if I lost Eugen I lost everything, for I, like him, and like all those who have been and are dearest to both of us, was a Child of the World.



CHAPTER III.

"Oftmals hab' ich geirrt, und habe mich wiedergefunden,
Aber glücklicher nie."

IT was beginning to be dusk when we alighted the next day at Lahnburg, a small wayside station, where the doctor's brand-new carriage met us, and after we had been bidden welcome, whirled us off to the doctor's brand-new Schloss, full of brand-new furniture. I skip it all, the renewed greetings, the hospitality, the noise. They were very kind. It was all right to me, and I enjoyed it immensely. I was in a state of mind in which I verily believe I should have enjoyed eating a plate of porridge for supper, or a dish of *Saurkraut* for dinner.

The subject for complacency and contemplation in Frau Mittendorf's life was her intimacy with the Von Rothenfels family, whose great, dark old Schloss, or, rather, a portion of it, looking grimly over its woods, she pointed out to me from the windows of her salon. I looked somewhat curiously at it, chiefly because Eugen had mentioned it, and also because it was such a stern, imposing old pile. It was built of red stone, and stood upon red stone foundations. Red were the rocks of this country, and hence its name, *Rothen-fels*, the red rocks. Woods, also dark, but now ablaze with the last fiery autumn tints, billowed beneath it; on the other side, said Frau Mittendorf, was a great plateau covered with large trees, intersected by long, straight avenues. She would take us to look at it; the Gräfin von Rothenfels was a great friend of hers.

She was entertaining us with stories to prove the great regard and respect of the Countess for her (Frau Mittendorf) on the morning after our arrival, while I was longing to go out and stroll along some of those plea-

sant breezy upland roads, or explore the sleepy, quaint old town below.

Upon her narrative came an interruption. A servant threw open the door very wide, announcing the Gräfin von Rothenfels. Frau Mittendorf rose in a tremulous flurry and flutter to greet her noble guest, and then introduced us to her.

A tall, melancholy, meagre-looking woman, far past youth—on the very confines of middle age; with iron-grey hair banded across a stern, much-lined brow. Colourless features of a strong, large, not unhandsome type, from which all liveliness and vivacity had long since fled. A stern mouth—steady, lustreless, severe eyes, a dignity—yes, even a majesty of mien which she did not attempt to soften into graciousness; black, trailing draperies; a haughty pride of movement.

Such was the first impression made upon me by Hildegarde, Countess of Rothenfels—a forbidding, if grand figure—aristocrat in every line; utterly alien and apart, I thought, from me and every feeling of mine.

But on looking again the human element

was found in the deeply-planted sadness which no reserve pride could conceal. Sad the eyes, sad the mouth; she was all sad together —and not without reason, as I afterwards learnt.

She was a rigid Roman Catholic, and at sixteen had been married for *les convenances* to her cousin, Count Bruno von Rothenfels, a man a good deal older than herself, though not preposterously so, and whose ample possessions and old name gave social position of the highest kind. But he was a Protestant by education, a thinker by nature, a rationalist by conviction.

That was one bitter grief. Another was her childlessness. She had been married twenty-four years: no child had sprung from the union. This was a continual grief which embittered her whole existence.

Since then I have seen a portrait of her at twenty—a splendid brunette, with high spirit and resolute will and noble beauty in every line. Ah me! What wretches we become! Sadness and bitterness, proud aloofness and a yearning wistfulness were subtly mingled

in the demeanour of Gräfin von Rothenfels.

She bowed to us, as Frau Mittendorf introduced us. She did not bestow a second glance upon Stella; but bent a long look, a second, a third scrutinising gaze upon me. I—I am not ashamed to own it—quivered somewhat under her searching glance. She impressed and fascinated me.

She seated herself, and slightly apologising to us for intruding domestic affairs, began to speak with Frau Mittendorf of some case of village distress in which they were both interested. Then she turned again to us, speaking in excellent English, and asked us whether we were staying there, after which she invited us to dine at her house the following day, with Frau Mittendorf. After the invitation had been accepted with sufficient reverence by that lady, the Countess rose, as if to go, and turning again to me with still that pensive, half-wistful, half-mistrustful gaze, she said:

"I have my carriage here. Would you like to come with me to see our woods and

house. They are sometimes interesting to strangers."

"Oh, very much!" I said eagerly.

"Then come," said she. "I will see that you are escorted back when you are tired. It is arranged that you remain until you feel *gêné, nicht wahr?*"

"Oh, thank you!" said I again, hastening to make myself ready, and parenthetically hoping, as I ran upstairs, that Frau Mittendorf's eyes might not start *quite* out of her head with pride at the honour conferred upon her house and visitors.

Very soon I was seated beside the Gräfin in the dark-green clarence with the grand coachman, and the lady's own *Jäger* beside him, and we were driving along a white road with a wild kind of country spreading round —moorland stretches, and rich deep woods. Up and down, for the way was uneven, till we entered a kind of park, and to the right, high above, I saw the great red pile with its little pointed towers crowned with things like extinguishers ending in a lightning-rod, and which seemed to spring from

all parts of the heavy mass of the main building.

That, then, was Schloss Rothenfels. It looked the very image of an aristocratic, ancient *feste Burg*, grim and grand; it brooded over us like a frown, and dominated the landscape for miles around. I was deeply impressed; such a place had always been like a dream to me.

There was something so imposingly conservative about it: it looked as if it had weathered so many storms; defying such paltry forces as wind and weather, and would abide through so many more, quite untouched by the roar of life and progress outside—a fit and firm keeping-place for old shields, for weapons honourably hacked and dinted, for tattered loyal flags—for art treasures and for proud beauties.

As we gained the height, I perceived the huge scale on which the Schloss was constructed. It was a little town in itself. I saw, too, that plateau on the other side, of which I had heard: later I explored it. It was a natural plain—a kind of table-land,

and was laid out in what have always, since I was a child, impressed me more than any other kind of surroundings to a house—mile-long avenues of great trees, stretching perfectly straight, like lines of marching troops in every direction.

Long, melancholy alleys and avenues, with huge, moss-grown stone figures and groups guarding the terraces or keeping fantastic watch over the stone tanks on whose surfaces floated the lazy water-lilies. Great moss-grown gods and goddesses, and strange hybrid beasts, and fauns and satyrs, and all so silent and forlorn, with the lush grass and heavy fern growing rank and thick under the stately trees. To right they stretched and to left; and straight away westward was one long, wide, vast, deserted avenue, at the end of which was an opening, and in the opening a huge stone myth or figure of a runner, who in the act of racing receives an arrow in his heart, and with arms madly tossed in the air, staggers back.

Behind this terrible figure the sun used to set, flaming, or mild, or sullen, and the vast

arms of it were outlined against the gorgeous sky, or in the half-dark it glimmered like a ghost and seemed to move. It had been there so long that none could remember the legend of it. It was a grim shape.

Scattered here and there were quaint wildernesses and pleasaunces—clipped yews and oddly-trained shrubs and flowers trying to make a diversion, but ever dominated by the huge woods, the straight avenues; the mathematical melancholy on an immense scale.

The Frau Gräfin glanced at me once or twice as my head turned eagerly this way and that, and my eyes could not take in the strange scene quickly enough; but she said nothing, nor did her severe face relax into any smile.

We stopped under a huge *porte-cochère* in which more servants were standing about.

"Come with me," said the lady to me. "First I will take you to my rooms, and then when you have rested a little you can do what you like."

Pleased at the prospect I followed her; through a hall which without any joking was baronial; through a corridor into a room, through which she passed, observing to me:

"This is the Rittersaal, one of the oldest rooms in the house."

The Rittersaal—a real, hereditary Hall of Knights where a *Sängerkrieg* might have taken place—where Tannhäuser and the others might have contended before Elizabeth. A polished parquet—a huge hearth on which burnt a large bright wood fire whose flames sparkled upon suits of mail in dozens—crossed swords and lances, over which hung tattered banners and bannerets. Shields and lances, portraits with each a pair of spurs beneath it—the men were all knights, of that line! dark and grave chiefly were these lords of the line of Sturm. In the centre of the hall a great trophy of arms and armour, all of which had been used, and used to purpose; the only drapery the banners over these lances and portraits. The room delighted me while it made me

feel small—very small. The Countess turned at a door at the other end and looked back upon me where I stood gasping in the doorway by which we had entered. *She* was one of the house; this had nothing overpowering for her, if it did give some of the pride to her mien.

I hurried after her, apologising for my tardiness: she waved the words back, and led me on to a smaller room, which appeared to be her own private sitting-room. Here she asked me to lay aside my things, adding that she hoped I should spend the day at the Schloss.

"If you find it not too intolerably stupid," she added. "It is a dull place."

I said that it seemed to me like something out of a fairy tale, and that I longed to see more of it if I might.

"Assuredly you shall. There may be some few things which you may like to see. I forget that every one is not like myself—tired. Are you musical?"

"*Very!*" said I emphatically.

"Then you will be interested in the music-rooms here. How old are you?"

I told her. She bowed gravely. "You are young, and I suppose, happy?" she remarked.

"Yes, I am — very happy — perfectly happy," said I, smiling, because I could not help it.

"When I saw you I was so struck with that look," said she. "I thought I had never seen any one look so radiantly, transcendently happy. I so seldom see it—and never feel it, and I wished to see more of you. I am very glad you *are* so happy—very glad. Now I will not keep you talking to me. I will send for Herr Nahrath, who shall be your guide."

She rang the bell. I was silent, although I longed to say that I could talk to her for a day without thinking of weariness, which indeed was true. She impressed and fascinated me.

"Send Herr Nahrath here," she said, and presently there came into the room a young man in the garb of what is called in

Germany a *Kandidat*—that is to say an embryo *Pastor*, or Parish Priest. He bowed very deeply to the Countess and did not speak or advance much beyond the door.

Having introduced us, she desired him to act as cicerone to me until I was tired. He bowed, and I did not dispute the mandate, although I would rather have remained with her, and got to know something of the nature that lay behind those grey passionless features, than turn to the society of that smug-looking young gentleman who waited so respectfully, like a machine whose mainspring was awe.

I accompanied him nevertheless, and he showed me part of the Schloss, and endeavoured in the intervals of his tolerably arduous task of cicerone to make himself agreeable to me. It was a wonderful place indeed—this Schloss. The deeper we penetrated into it, the more absorbed and interested did I become. Such piled-up, profusely-scattered treasures of art it had never before fallen to my lot to behold. The

abundance was prodigal; the judgment, cultivation, high perception of truth, rarity and beauty, seemed almost faultless. Gems of pictures—treasures of sculpture, bronze, china, carvings, glass, coins, curiosities which it would have taken a lifetime properly to learn. Here I saw for the first time a private library on a large scale, collected by generation after generation of highly-cultured men and women—a perfect thing of its kind, and one which impressed me mightily; but it was not there that I was destined to find the treasure which lay hidden for me in this enchanted palace. We strayed over an acre or so of passage and corridor till he paused before an arched door across which hung a curtain, and over which was inscribed *Musik-kammern* (The Music Rooms).

"If you wish to see the music, *mein Fräulein*, I must leave you in the hands of Herr Brunken, who will tolerate no cicerone but himself."

"Oh, I wish to see it, certainly," said I, on fire with curiosity.

He knocked, and was bidden *Herein!* but

not going in, told some one inside that he recommended to his charge a young lady staying with the Countess, and who was desirous of seeing the collection.

"Pray, *mein Fräulein,* come in!" said a voice. Herr Nahrath left me, and I, lifting the curtain and pushing open the half-closed door found myself in an octagonal room, confronted by the quaintest figure I had ever seen. An old man whose long grey hair, long white beard, and long black robe made him look like a wizard or astrologer of some mediæval romance, was smiling at me and bidding me welcome to his domain. He was the librarian and general custodian of the musical treasures of Schloss Rothenfels, and his name was Brunken. He loved his place and his treasures with a jealous love, and would talk of favourite instruments as if they had been dear children, and of great composers as if they were gods.

All around the room were large shelves filled with music—and over each division stood a name—such mighty names as Scarlatti, Bach, Händel, Beethoven, Schumann,

Mozart, Haydn—all the giants, and apparently all the pigmies too, were there. It was a complete library of music, and though I have seen many since, I have never beheld any which in the least approached this in richness and completeness. Rare old manuscript scores; priceless editions of half-forgotten music; the literature of the productions of half-forgotten composers; Eastern music, Western music; and music of all ages; it was an idealised collection—a musician's paradise, only less so than that to which he now led me, from amidst the piled-up scores and the gleaming busts of those mighty men, who here at least were honoured with never-failing reverence.

He took me into a second room, or rather hall, of great size, height, and dimensions, a museum of musical instruments. It would take far too long to do it justice in description: indeed, on that first brief investigation I could only form a dim, general idea of the richness of its treasures. What histories—what centuries of story were there piled up! Musical instruments of every imaginable form

and shape, and in every stage of development. Odd-looking pre-historic bone embryo instruments from different parts of France. Strange old things from Nineveh, and India, and Peru, instruments from tombs and pyramids, and ancient ruined temples in tropic groves—things whose very nature and handling is a mystery and a dispute—tuned to strange scales which produce strange melodies, and carry us back into other worlds. On them, perhaps, has the swarthy Ninevan, or slight Hindoo, or some

"Dusky youth with painted plumage gay"

performed as he apostrophised his mistress' eyebrow. On that queer-looking thing which may be a fiddle or not—which may have had a bow or not—a slightly-clad slave made music while his master the Rayah played chess with his favourite wife. They are all dead and gone now, and their jewels are worn by others, and the memory of them has vanished from off the earth; and these, their musical instruments, repose in a quiet corner amid the rough hills and oakwoods and under

the cloudy skies of the land of music—*Deutschland.*

Down through the changing scale, through the whole range of cymbal and spinet, "flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and *all* kinds of music" stand literally before me, and a strange revelation it is. Is it the same faculty which produces that grand piano of Bechstein's, and that clarion organ of Silbermann's, and that African drum dressed out with human skulls, that war-trumpet hung with tiger's teeth? After this nothing is wonderful! Strange, unearthly-looking Chinese frames of sonorous stones or modulated bells; huge drums, painted and carved, and set up on stands six feet from the ground; quaint instruments from the palaces of Aztec Incas, down to pianos by Broadwood, Collard and Collard, and Bechstein.

There were trophies of *Streichinstrumente* and *Blaseinstrumente.* I was allowed to gaze upon two real Stradivarius fiddles. I might see the development by evolution, and the survival of the fittest in violin, *cello*, con-

trabass, alto, beside countless others whose very names have perished with the time that produced them, and the fingers which played them—ingenious guesses, clever misses—the tragedy of harmony as well as its *Io Pœan!*

There were wind instruments, quaint old double flutes from Italy; pipes, single, double, treble, from ages much farther back; harps—Assyrian, Greek, and Roman; instruments of percussion, guitars, and cithers in every form and kind; a dulcimer—I took it up and thought of Coleridge's "damsel with a dulcimer;" and a grand organ, as well as many incipient organs, and the quaint little things of that nature from China, Japan, and Siam.

I stood and gazed in wonder and amazement.

"Surely the present Graf has not collected all these instruments!" said I.

"Oh no, *mein Fräulein;* they have been accumulating for centuries. They tell strange tales of what the Sturms will do for music."

With which he proceeded to tell me certain narratives of certain instruments in the collection, in which he evidently firmly believed, including one relating to a quaint old violin for which he said a certain Graf von Rothenfels called *Max der Tolle*, or the mad Count Max, had sold his soul.

As he finished this last he was called away, and excusing himself, left me. I was alone in this voiceless temple of so many wonderful sounds. I looked round, and a feeling of awe and weirdness crept over me. My eyes would not leave that shabby old fiddle, concerning whose demoniac origin I had just heard such a cheerful little anecdote. Every one of those countless instruments was capable of harmony and discord—had sometime been used; pressed, touched, scraped, beaten or blown into by hands or mouths long since crumbled to dust. What tales had been told! what songs sung, and in what languages; what laughs laughed, tears shed, vows spoken, kisses exchanged, over some of those silent pieces of wood, brass, ivory, and catgut! The feelings of all the histories

that surrounded me had something eerie in it.

I stayed until I began to feel nervous, and was thinking of going away when sounds from a third room drew my attention. Some one in there began to play the violin, and to play it with no ordinary delicacy of manipulation. There was something exquisitely finished, refined, and delicate about the performance; it lacked the bold splendour and originality of Eugen's playing, but it was so lovely as to bring tears to my eyes, and, moreover, the air was my favourite *Träumerei*. Something in those sounds, too, was familiar to me. With a sudden beating of the heart, a sudden eagerness, I stepped hastily forward, pushed back the dividing curtain, and entered the room whence proceeded those sounds.

In the middle of the room, which was bare and empty, but which had large windows looking across the melancholy plateau, and to the terrible figure of the runner at the end of the avenue—stood a boy—a child with a violin. He was dressed richly, in velvet and

silk; he was grown—the slender delicacy of his form was set off by the fine clothing that rich men's children wear; his beautiful waving black hair was somewhat more closely cut, but the melancholy yet richly-coloured young face that turned towards me—the deep and yearning eyes, the large, solemn gaze, the premature gravity, were all his—it was Sigmund, Courvoisier's boy.

For a moment we both stood motionless—hardly breathing; then he flung his violin down, sprang forward with a low sound of intense joy, exclaiming:

"*Das Fräulein, das Fräulein,* from home!" and stood before me trembling from head to foot.

I snatched the child to my heart (he looked so much older and sadder), and covered him with kisses.

He submitted—nay, more, he put his arms about my neck and laid his face upon my shoulder, and presently, as if he had choked down some silent emotion, looked up at me with large, imploring, sad eyes, and asked:

"Have you seen my father?"

"Sigmund, I saw him the day before yesterday."

"You saw him — you spoke to him, perhaps?"

"Yes. I spoke long with him."

"What did he look like?"

"As he always does—brave and true and noble."

"*Nicht wahr?*" said the boy, with flashing eyes. "I know how he looks, just. I am waiting till I am grown up, that I may go to him again."

"Do you like me, Sigmund?"

"Yes; very much."

"Do you think you could love me? Would you trust me to love those you love?"

"Do yon mean *him?*" he asked point-blank, and looked at me, somewhat startled.

"Yes."

"I—don't—know."

"I mean, to take care of him, and try to make him happy till you come to

him again, and then we will all be together."

He looked doubtful still.

"What I mean, Sigmund, is that your father and I are going to be married; but we shall never be quite happy until you are with us."

He stood still, taking it in, and I waited in much anxiety. I was certain that if I had time and opportunity I could win him; but I feared the result of this sudden announcement, and then separation. He might only see that his father—his supreme idol—could turn for comfort to another, while he would not know how I loved him and longed to make his grave young life happy for him. I put my arm round his shoulder, and kneeling down beside him, said:

"You must say you are glad, Sigmund, or you will make me very unhappy. I want you to love me as well as him. Look at me and tell me you will trust me till we are all together, for I am sure we shall be together some day."

He still hesitated some little time, but at

last said, with the sedateness peculiar to him, as of one who overcame a struggle and made a sacrifice :

"If he has decided it so it must be right, you know, but—but—you won't let him forget me, will you ?"

The child's nature overcame that which had been as it were supplanted and grafted upon it. The lip quivered, the dark eyes filled with tears. Poor little lonely child ! desolate and sad in the midst of all the grandeur ! My heart yearned to him.

"Forget you, Sigmund ? Your father never forgets ; he *cannot*."

"I wish I was grown up," was all he said.

Then it occurred to me to wonder how he got there, and in what relation he stood to these people.

"Do you live here, Sigmund ?"

"Yes."

"What relation are you to the Herr Graf ?"

"Graf von Rothenfels is my uncle."

"And are they kind to you ?" I asked in

a hasty whisper, for his intense gravity and sadness oppressed me. I trembled to think of having to tell his father in what state I had found him.

"Oh yes!" said he. "Yes, very."

"What do you do all day?"

"I learn lessons from Herr Nahrath, and I ride with uncle Bruno, and—and—oh! I do whatever I like. Uncle Bruno says that some time I shall go to Bonn, or Heidelberg, or Jena, or England, whichever I like."

"And have you no friends?"

"I like being with Brunken the best. He talks to me about my father sometimes. He knew him when he was only as old as I am."

"Did he? Oh, I did not know that."

"But they won't tell me why my father never comes here, and why they never speak of him," he added wearily, looking with melancholy eyes across the lines of wood, through the wide window.

"Be sure it is for nothing wrong. He does nothing but what is good and right," said I.

"Oh, of course! But I can't tell the reason. I think and think about it." He put his hand wearily to his head. "They never speak of him. Once I said something about him. It was at a great dinner they had. Aunt Hildegarde turned quite pale, and Uncle Bruno called me to him and said—no one heard it but me, you know—'Never let me hear that name again!' and his eyes looked so fierce. I'm tired of this place," he added mournfully. "I want to be at Elberthal again—at the Wehrhahn, with my father and Friedhelm and Karl Linders. I think of them every hour. I liked Karl and Friedhelm, and Gretchen, and Frau Schmidt."

"They do not live there now, dear, Friedhelm and your father," said I gently.

"Not? Then where are they?"

"I do not know," I was forced to say. "They were fighting in the war. I think they live at Berlin now, but I am not at all sure."

This uncertainty seemed to cause him much distress, and he would have added more, but our conversation was brought to

an end by the entrance of Brunken, who looked rather surprised to see us in such close and earnest consultation.

"Will you show me the way back to the Countess's room?" said I to Sigmund.

He put his hand in mine, and led me through many of those interminable halls and passages until we came to the Rittersaal again.

"Sigmund," said I, "are you not proud to belong to these?" and I pointed to the dim portraits hanging around.

"Yes," said he doubtfully. "Uncle Bruno is always telling me that I must do nothing to disgrace their name, because I shall one day rule their lands; but," he added, with more animation, "do you not see all these likenesses? These are all counts of Rothenfels, who have been heads of the family. You see the last one is here—Graf Bruno—my uncle. But in another room there are a great many more portraits, ladies and children and young men, and a man is painting a likeness of me, which is going to

be hung up there ; but *my father is not there.* What does it mean ?"

I was silent. I knew his portrait must have been removed because he was considered to be living in dishonour—a stain to the house, who was perhaps the most chivalrous of the whole race ; but this I could not tell Sigmund. It was beginning already, the trial, the "test" of which he had spoken to me, and it was harder in reality than in anticipation.

"I don't want to be stuck up there where he has no place," Sigmund went on sullenly. "And I should like to cut the hateful picture to pieces when it comes."

With this he ushered me into Gräfin Hildegarde's boudoir again. She was still there, and a tall, stately, stern-looking man of some fifty years was with her.

His appearance gave me a strange shock. He was Eugen, older and without any of his artist brightness ; Eugen's grace turned into pride and stony hauteur. He looked as if he could be savage upon occasion ; a nature born to power and nurtured in it. Ruggedly

upright, but narrow. I learnt him by heart afterwards, and found that every act of his was the direct, unsoftened outcome of his nature.

This was Graf Bruno; this was the proud, intensely feeling man who had never forgiven the stain which he supposed his brother had brought upon their house; this was he who had proposed such hard, bald, pitiless terms concerning the parting of father and son—who forbade the child to speak of the loved one.

"Ha!" said he, "you have found Sigmund, *mein Fräulein?* Where did you meet, then?"

His keen eyes swept me from head to foot. In that, at least, Eugen resembled him; my lover's glance was as hawk-like as this, and as impenetrable.

"In the music-room," said Sigmund: and the uncle's glance left me and fell upon the boy.

I soon read *that* story. The child was at once the light of his eyes and the bitterness of his life. As for Countess Hildegarde, she

gazed at her nephew with all a mother's soul in her pathetic eyes, and was silent.

"Come here," said the Graf, seating himself and drawing the boy to him. "What hast thou been doing?"

There was no fear in the child's demeanour —he was too thoroughly a child of their own race to know fear—but there was no love, no lighting up of the features, no glad meeting of the eyes.

"I was with Nahrath till Aunt Hildegarde sent for him, and then I went to practise."

"Practise what? Thy riding or fencing?"

"No; my violin."

"Bah! What an extraordinary thing it is that this lad has no taste for anything but fiddling," observed the uncle, half aside.

Gräfin Hildegarde looked sharply and apprehensively up.

Sigmund shrank a little away from his uncle, not timidly, but with some distaste. Words were upon his lips; his eyes flashed,

his lips parted; then he checked himself, and was silent.

"*Nun denn!*" said the Count. "What hast thou? Out with it!"

"Nothing that it would please thee to hear, uncle; therefore I will not say it," was the composed retort.

The grim-looking man laughed a grim little laugh, as if satisfied with the audacity of the boy, and his grizzled moustache swept the soft cheek.

"I ride no further this morning: but this afternoon I shall go to Mulhausen. Wilt thou come with me?"

"Yes, uncle."

Neither willing nor unwilling was the tone, and the answer appeared to dissatisfy the other, who said:

"'Yes, uncle'—what does that mean? Dost thou not wish to go?"

"Oh yes! I would as soon go as stay at home."

"But the distance, Bruno," here interposed the Countess in a low tone. "I am sure it is too far. He is not strong."

"Distance? Pooh! Hildegarde, I wonder at you; considering what stock you come of, you should be superior to such nonsense! Wert thou thinking of the distance, Sigmund?"

"Distance—no," said he indifferently.

"Come with me," said the elder. "I want to show thee something."

They went out of the room together. Yes, it was self-evident; the man idolised the child. Strange mixture of sternness and softness! The supposed sin of the father was never to be pardoned; but natural affection was to have its way, and be lavished upon the son; and the son could not return it, because the influence of the banished scapegrace was too strong—he had won it all for himself, as scapegraces have the habit of doing.

Again I was left alone with the Countess, sitting upright over her embroidery. A dull life this great lady led. She cared nothing for the world's gaieties, and she had neither chick nor child to be ambitious for. Her husband was polite enough to her; but

she knew perfectly well, and accepted it as a matter of course, that the death of her who had lived with him and been his companion for twenty-five years, would have weighed less by half with him than any catastrophe to that mournful, unenthusiastic child, who had not been two years under their roof, and who displayed no delight in the wealth of love lavished upon him.

She knew that *she* also adored the child, but that his affection was hard to get. She dared not show her love openly, or in the presence of her husband, who seemed to look upon the boy as his exclusive property, and was as jealous as a tiger of the few and faint testimonies of affection manifested by his darling. A dull journey to Berlin once a year, an occasional visitor, the society of her director and that of her husband—who showed how much at home with her he felt by going to sleep whenever he was more than quarter of an hour in her presence—a little interest of a lofty, distant kind in her townspeople of the poorer sort, an occasional call upon or from some distant neighbour of a rank ap-

proaching her own ; for the rest, embroidery in the newest patterns and most elegant style ; some few books, chiefly religious and polemical works—and what can be drearier than Roman Catholic polemics, unless, indeed, Protestant ones eclipse them ?—a large house, vast estates, servants who never raised their voices beyond a certain tone ; the envy of all the middle-class women, the fear and reverential curtsies of the poorer ones—a cheerful existence, and one which accounted for some of the wrinkles which so plentifully decked her brow.

"That is our nephew," said she ; "my husband's heir."

"I have often seen him before," said I ; "but I should have thought that his father would be your husband's next heir."

Never shall I forget the look she darted upon me—the awful glance which swept over me scathingly, ere she said, in icy tones :

"What do you mean ? Have you seen—or do you know—Graf Eugen ?"

There was a pause, as if the name had not

passed her lips for so long that now she had difficulty in uttering it.

"I knew him as Eugen Courvoisier," said I; but the other name was a revelation to me, and told me that he was also "to the manner born." "I saw him two days ago, and I conversed with him," I added.

She was silent for a moment, and surveyed me with a haggard look. I met her glance fully, openly.

"Do you wish to know anything about him?" I asked.

"Certainly not," said she, striving to speak frigidly; but there was a piteous tremble in her low tones. "The man has dis—— What am I saying? It is sufficient to say that he is not on terms with his family."

"So he told me," said I, struggling on my own part to keep back the burning words that rose within me.

The Countess looked at me—looked again. I saw now that this was one of the great sorrows of her sorrowful life. She felt that to be consistent she *ought* to wave aside the subject with calm contempt; but it made her

heart bleed. I pitied her; I felt an odd kind of affection for her already. The promise I had given to Eugen lay hard and heavy upon me.

"What did he tell you?" she asked at last; and I paused ere I answered, trying to think what I could make of this opportunity. "Do you know the facts of the case?" she added.

"No; he said he would write."

"Would *write!*" she echoed, suspending her work, and fixing me with her eyes. "Would write—to whom?"

"To me."

"You correspond with him?" There was a tremulous eagerness in her manner.

"I have never corresponded with him yet," said I, "but I have known him long, and loved him almost from the first. The other day I promised — to — marry him."

"You?" said she; "you are going to marry Eugen! Are you"—Her eyes said, "Are you good enough for him?" but she came to an abrupt conclusion. "Tell me,"

said she; "where did you meet him, and how?"

I told her in what capacity I had become acquainted with him, and she listened breathlessly. Every moment I felt the prohibition to speak heavier, for I saw that the Countess of Rothenfels would have been only too delighted to hail any idea, any suggestion, which should allow her to indulge the love that, though so strong, she rigidly repressed. I dare say I told my story in a halting kind of way; it was difficult for me on the spur of the moment to know clearly what to say and what to leave unsaid. As I told the Countess about Eugen's and my voyage down the river, a sort of smile tried to struggle out upon her lips; it was evidently as good as a romance to her. I finished, saying:

"That is the truth, *gnädige Frau*. All I fear is that I am not good enough for him—shall not satisfy him."

"My child!" said she, and paused. "My dear child," she took both my hands, and her lips quivered, "you do not know how I feel for you. I can feel for you because I

fear that with you it will be as it was with me. Do you know any of the *circumstances* under which Eugen von Rothenfels left his friends?"

"I do not know them circumstantially. I know he was accused of something, and—and—did not—I mean——"

"*Could* not deny it," she said. "I dare not take the responsibility of leaving you in ignorance. I must tell you all, and may Our Lady give me eloquence!"

"I should like to hear the story, madame, but I do not think any eloquence will change my mind."

"He always had a manner calculated to deceive and charm," said she; "always. Well, my husband is his half-brother. I was their cousin. They are the sons of different mothers, and my husband is many years older than Eugen—eighteen years older. He, my husband, was thirty years old when he succeeded to the name and estates of his father—Eugen, you see, was just twelve years old, a schoolboy. We were just married. It is a very long time ago—*ach, ja!* a very

long time ago! We played the part of parents to that boy. We were childless, and as time went on, we lavished upon him all the love which we should have bestowed upon our own children had we been happy enough to have any. I do not think any one was ever better loved than he. It so happened that his own inheritance was not a large one; that made no difference. My husband, with my fullest consent and approbation, had every intention of providing for him: we had enough and to spare: money and land and house-room for half-a-dozen families, and our two selves alone to enjoy it all. He always *seemed* fond of us. I suppose it was his facile manner, which could take the appearance of an interest and affection which he did not feel——"

"No, Frau Gräfin! no, indeed!"

"Wait till you have heard all, my poor child. Every one loved him. How proud I was of him. Sometimes I think it is a chastisement, but had you been in my place you would have been proud too; so gallant, so handsome, such grace, and such a charm.

He was the joy of my life," she said in a passionate undertone. "He went by the name of a worthy descendant of his ancestors in all essential things: honour and loyalty and bravery, and so on. They used to call him *Prinz Eugen, der edle Ritter*, after the old song. He was wild and impatient of control, but who is not? I hate your young men whose veins run milk, not blood. He was one of a fiery, passionate line. At the universities he was extravagant; we heard of all sorts of follies."

"Did you ever hear of anything base—anything underhand or dishonourable?"

"Never—oh, never. High play. He was very intimate with a set of young Englishmen, and the play was dreadful, it is true; he betted too. That is a curse. Play and horses, and general recklessness and extravagance, but no wine and no women. I never heard that he had the least affinity for either of these dissipations. There were debts—I suppose all young men in his position make debts," said the Countess placidly. "My husband made debts at college, and I

am sure my brothers did. Then he left college and lived at home awhile, and that was the happiest time of my life. But it is over.

"Then he entered the army—of course. His family interest procured him promotion. He was captain in a fine Uhlan regiment. He was with his regiment at Berlin and Munich, and—— And always we heard the same tales — play and wild, fast living. Music always had a hold upon him.

"In the midst of his extravagance he was sometimes so simple. I remember we were dreadfully frightened at a rumour that he had got entangled with Fräulein ——, a singer of great beauty at the *Hofoper* at ——. I got my husband to let me write about it. I soon had an answer from Eugen. How he laughed at me! He had paid a lot of debts for the girl, which had been pressing heavily upon her since her career began; now he said he trusted she would get along swimmingly; he was going to her benefit that night.

"But when he was at ——, and when he was about six and twenty, he really did get

engaged to be married. He wrote and told us about it. That was the first bitter blow: she was an Italian girl of respectacle but by no means noble family—he was always a dreadful radical in such matters. She was governess in the house of one of his friends in ——.

"We did everything we could think of to divert him from it. It was useless. He married her, but he did not become less extravagant. She did not help him to become steady, I must say. She liked gaiety and admiration, and he liked her to be worshipped. He indulged her frightfully. He played—he would play so dreadfully.

"We had his wife over to see us, and he came with her. We were agreeably surprised. She quite won our hearts. She was very beautiful and very charming—had rather a pretty voice, though nothing much. We forgave all his misconduct, and my husband talked to him and implored him to amend. He said he would. Mere promises! It was so easy to him to make promises.

"That poor young wife! Instead of pity-

ing him for having made a mésalliance, we know now that it was she who was to be pitied for having fallen into the hands of such a black-hearted, false man——"

The lady paused. The recital evidently cost her some pain and some emotion. She went on:

"She was expecting her confinement. They returned to —— where we also had a house, and we went with them. Vittoria shortly afterwards gave birth to a son. That was in our house. My husband would have it so. That son was to reconcile all and make everything straight. At that time Eugen must have been in some anxiety: he had been betting heavily on the English Derby. We did not know that, nor why he had gone to England. At last it came out that he was simply ruined. My husband was dreadfully cut up. I was very unhappy —so unhappy that I was ill and confined to my room.

"My husband left town for a few days to come over to Rothenfels on business. Eugen was scarcely ever in the house. I thought it

was our reproachful faces that he did not wish to see. Then my husband came back. He was more cheerful. He had been thinking things over, he said. He kissed me, and told me to cheer up: he had a plan for Eugen, which, he believed, would set all right again.

"In that very moment some one asked to see him. It was a clerk from the bank with a cheque which they had cashed the day before. Had my husband signed it? I saw him look at it for a moment. Then he sent the man away, saying that he was then busy and would communicate with him. Then he showed me the cheque. It was payable to the bearer, and across the back was written "Vittoria von Rothenfels."

"You must bear in mind that Eugen was living in his own house, in another quarter of the town. My husband sent the cheque to him, with a brief inquiry as to whether he knew anything about it. Then he went out: he had an appointment, and when he returned he found a letter from Eugen. It was not long: it was burnt into my heart, and I

have never forgotten a syllable of it. It was :

"'I return the cheque. I am guilty. I relieve you of all further responsibility about me. It is evident that I am not fit for my position. I leave this place for ever, taking the boy with me. Vittoria does not seem to care about having him. Will you look after her? Do not let her starve in punishment for my sin. For me—I leave you for ever.

"'EUGEN.'

"That was the letter. *Ei! mein Gott!* Oh, it is hideous, child, to find that those in whom you *believed* so intensely are bad—rotten to the core. I had loved Eugen : he had made a sunshine in my not very cheerful life. His coming was a joy to me, his going away a sorrow. It made everything so much blacker when the truth came out. Of course the matter was hushed up.

"My husband took immediate steps about it. Soon afterwards we came here ; Vittoria with us. Poor girl ! Poor girl ! She did

nothing but weep and wring her hands, moan and lament and wonder why she had ever been born, and at last she died of decline—that is to say, they called it decline, but it was really a broken heart. That is the story—a black chronicle, is it not? You know about Sigmund's coming here. My husband remembered that he was heir to our name, and we were in a measure responsible for him. Eugen had taken the name of a distant family connection on his mother's side—she had French blood in her veins—Courvoisier. Now you know all, my child—he is *not* good. Do not trust him."

I was silent. My heart burned; my tongue longed to utter ardent words, but I remembered his sad smile as he said, "You shrink from that," and I braced myself to silence. The thing seemed to me altogether so pitiable—and yet—and yet, I had sworn. But how had *he* lived out these five terrible years?

By-and-by the luncheon-bell rang. We all met once more. I felt every hour more like one in a dream or in some impossible old

romance. That piece of outward death-like reserve, the Countess, with the fire within which she was for ever spending her energy in attempts to quench; that conglomeration of ice, pride, roughness and chivalry, the Herr Graf himself; the thin, wooden-looking priest, the director of the *Gräfin;* that lovely picture of grace and bloom, with the dash of melancholy, Sigmund; certainly it was the strangest company in which I had ever been present.

The Countess sent me home in the afternoon, reminding me that I was engaged to dine there with the others to-morrow. I managed to get a word aside with Sigmund —to kiss him and tell him I should come to see him again. Then I left them; interested, enthralled, fascinated with them and their life, and—more in love with Eugen than ever.



CHAPTER IV.

"WHERE IS MY FATHER?"

WE had been bidden to dine at the Schloss—Frau Mittendorf, Stella, and I. In due time the Doctor's new carriage was called out, and seated in it we were driven to the great castle. With a renewed joy and awe, I looked at it by twilight, with the dusk of sunset veiling its woods and turning the whole mass to the colour of a deep earth-stain. Eugen's home: there he had been born; as the child of such a race, and in its traditions he had been nurtured by that sad lady whom we were going to see. I at least knew that he had acted, was now

acting, up to the very standard of his high calling. The place had lost much of its awfulness for me; it had become even friendly and lovely.

The dinner was necessarily a solemn one. I was looking out for Sigmund, who, however, did not put in any appearance.

After dinner, when we were all assembled in a vast salon which the numberless wax-lights did but partially and in the centre illuminate, I determined to make an effort at release from this seclusion, and asked the Countess (who had motioned me to a seat beside her) where Sigmund was.

"He seemed a little languid and not inclined to come downstairs," said she. "I expect he is in the music-room—he generally finds his way there."

"Oh, I wish you would allow me to go and see him."

"Certainly, my child," said she, ringing; and presently a servant guided me to the door of the music-rooms, and in answer to my knock I was bidden *Herein!*

I entered. The room was in shadow; but

a deep, glowing fire burnt in a great cavernous, stone fireplace, and shone upon huge brass andirons on either side the hearth. In an easy-chair sat Brunken, the old librarian, and his white hair and beard were also warmed into rosiness by the fire-glow. At his feet lay Sigmund, who had apparently been listening to some story of his old friend. His hands were clasped about the old man's knee, his face upturned, his hair pushed back.

Both turned as I came in; and Sigmund sprang up, but ere he had advanced two paces, paused and stood still, as if overcome with languor or weariness.

"Sigmund, I have come to see you," said I, coming to the fire and greeting the old man, who welcomed me hospitably.

I took Sigmund's hand: it was hot and dry. I kissed him: lips and cheeks were burning and glowing crimson. I swept the hair from his brow: that too was burning, and his temples throbbed. His eyes met mine with a strange, misty look. Saying nothing, I seated myself in a low chair near

the fire, and drew him to me. He nestled up to me, and I felt that if Eugen could see us he would be almost satisfied. Sigmund did not *say* anything. He merely settled his head upon my breast, gave a deep sigh as if of relief, and closing his eyes, said :

"Now, Brunken, go on !"

"As I was saying, *mein Liebling*, I hope to prove all former theorists and writers upon the subject to have been wrong——"

"He's talking about a *Magrepha*," said Sigmund, still not opening his eyes.

"A *Magrepha*—what may that be ?" I inquired.

"Yes. Some people say it was a real full-blown organ," explained Sigmund in a thick, hesitating voice, "and some say it was nothing better than a bagpipe—oh dear ! how my head does ache !—and there *are* people who say it was a kettle-drum—nothing more nor less ; and Brunken is going to show that not one of them knew anything about it."

"I hope so, at least," said Brunken, with modest placidity.

"Oh, indeed !" said I, glancing a little

timidly into the far recesses of the deep, ghostly room, where the firelight kept catching the sheen of metal; the yellow whiteness of ivory keys or pipes, or the polished case of some stringed instrument.

Strange, grotesque shapes loomed out in the uncertain, flickering light; but was it not a strange and haunted chamber? Ever it seemed to me as if breaths of air blew through it, which came from all imaginable kinds of graves, and were the breaths of those departed ones who had handled the strange collection, and who wished to finger, or blow into, or beat the dumb, unvibrating things once more.

Did I say unvibrating? I was wrong, then. The strings sometimes quivered to sounds that set them trembling; something like a whispered tone I have heard from the deep, upturned throats of great brazen trumpets—something like a distant moan floating around the gilded organ-pipes. In after-days, when Friedhelm Helfen knew this room he made a wonderful fantasia about it, in which all the dumb instruments woke up,

or tried to waken up to life again, for the whole place impressed him, he told me, as nothing that he had ever known before.

Brunken went on in a droning tone, giving theories of his own as to the nature of the Magrepha, and I, with my arms around Sigmund, half listened to the sleepy monotone of the good old visionary. But what spoke to me with a more potent voice was the soughing and wuthering of the sorrowful wind without, which verily moaned around the old walls, and sought out the old corners, and wailed, and plained, and sobbed in a way that was enough to break one's heart.

By degrees a silence settled upon us. Brunken, having satisfactorily annihilated his enemies, ceased to speak; the fire burnt lower; Sigmund's eyes were closed; his cheeks were not less flushed than before, nor his brow less hot, and a frown contracted it. I know not how long a time had passed, but I had no wish to rise.

The door was opened, and some one came

into the room. I looked up. It was the Gräfin. Brunken rose and stood to one side, bowing.

I could not get up, but some movement of mine, perhaps, disturbed the heavy and feverish slumber of the child. He started wide awake, with a look of wild terror, and gazed down into the darkness, crying out:

"*Mein Vater*, where art thou?"

A strange, startled, frightened look crossed the face of the Countess when she heard the words. She did not speak, and I said some soothing words to Sigmund.

But there could be no doubt that he was very ill. It was quite unlike his usual silent courage and reticence to wring his small hands and with ever-increasing terror turn a deaf ear to my soothings, sobbing out in tones of pain and insistence:

"Father! father! where art thou? I want thee!"

Then he began to cry pitifully, and the only word that was heard was "Father!" It was like some recurrent wail in a piece of

music, which warns one all through of a coming tragedy.

"Oh dear! What is to be done? Sigmund! *Was ist denn mit dir, mein Engel?*" said the poor Countess, greatly distressed.

"He is ill," said I. "I think he has taken an illness. Does thy head ache, Sigmund?"

"Yes," said he, "it does. Where is my own father? My head never ached when I was with my father."

"*Mein Gott! mein Gott!*" said the Countess in a low tone. "I thought he had forgotten his father."

"Forgotten!" echoed I. "Frau Gräfin, he is one of yourselves. *You* do not seem to forget."

"*Herrgott!*" she exclaimed, wringing her hands. "What can be the matter with him? What must I say to Bruno? Sigmund, darling, what hast thou then? What ails thee?"

"I want my father!" he repeated. Nor would he utter any other word. The one

idea, long dormant, had now taken full possession of him; in fever, half delirious, out of the fulness of his heart his mouth spake.

"Sigmund, *Liebchen*," said the Countess, "control thyself. Thy uncle must not hear thee say that word."

"I don't want my uncle. I want my *father!*" said Sigmund, looking restlessly round. "Oh, where is he? I have not seen him—it is so long, and I want him. I love him; I do love my father, and I want him."

It was pitiful, pathetic, somewhat tragic too. The poor Countess had not the faintest idea what to do with the boy, whose illness frightened her. I suggested that he should be put to bed and the doctor sent for, as he had probably taken some complaint which would declare itself in a few days, and might be merely some childish disorder.

The Countess seized my suggestion eagerly. Sigmund was taken away. I saw him no more that night. Presently we left the Schloss and drove home.

I found a letter waiting for me from Eugen. He was still at Elberthal, and appeared to have been reproaching himself for having accepted my "sacrifice," as he called it. He spoke of Sigmund. There was more, too, in the letter, which made me both glad and sad. I felt life spreading before me, endowed with a gravity, a largeness of aim, and a dignity of purpose such as I had never dreamt of before.

It seemed that for me, too, there was work to do. I also had a love for whose sake to endure. This made me feel grave. Eugen's low spirits, and the increased bitterness with which he spoke of things, made me sad; but something else made me glad. Throughout his whole letter there breathed a passion, a warmth—restrained, but glowing through its bonds of reticent words—an eagerness which told me that at last

"As I love, loved am I."

Even after that sail down the river I had felt a half mistrust: now all doubts were

removed. He loved me. He had learnt it in all its truth and breadth since we last parted. He talked of renunciation, but it was with an anguish so keen as to make me wince for him who felt it. If he tried to renounce me now, it would not be the cold laying aside of a thing for which he did not care, it would be the wrenching himself away from his heart's desire. I triumphed in the knowledge, and this was what made me glad.

Almost before we had finished breakfast in the morning, there came a thundering of wheels up to the door, and a shriek of excitement from Frau Mittendorf, who, *Morgenhaube* on her head, shapeless old morning gown clinging hideously about her ample figure, rushed to the window, looked out, and announced the carriage of the Frau Gräfin.

"*Aber!* What can she want at this early hour?" she speculated, coming into the room again and staring at us both with wide open eyes, round with agitation and importance. "But I dare say she wishes to consult me

upon some matter. I wish I were dressed more becomingly. I have heard—that is, I know, for I am so intimate with her—that she never wears *négligé*. I wonder if I should have time to——"

She stopped to hold out her hand for the note which a servant was bringing in; but her face fell when the missive was presented to *me*.

"Liebe Mai" (it began),

"Will you come and help me in my trouble? Sigmund is *very* ill. Sometimes he is delirious. He calls for you often. It breaks my heart to find that after all not a word is uttered of *us*, but only of Eugen (burn this when you have read it), of you, and of 'Karl,' and "Friedhelm,' and one or two other names which I do not know. I fear this petition will sound troublesome to you, who were certainly not made for trouble, but you are kind. I saw it in your face. I grieve too much. Truly the flesh is fearfully weak. I would live as if earth had no joys for me—as indeed it has none—and yet

that does not prevent my suffering. May God help me! Trusting to you,

"Your

"HILDEGARDE V. ROTHENFELS."

I lost no time in complying with this summons. In a few moments I was in the carriage; ere long I was at the Schloss, was met by Countess Hildegarde, looking like a ghost that had been keeping a strict Lent, and was at last by Sigmund's bedside.

He was tossing feverishly from side to side, murmuring and muttering. But when he saw me he was still, a sweet, frank smile flitted over his face—a smile wonderfully like that which his father had lately bent upon me. He gave a little laugh, saying:

"Fräulein May! *Willkommen!* Have you brought my father? And I should like to see Friedhelm too. You and *der Vater* and Friedel used to sit near together at the concert, don't you remember? I went once, and you sang. That tall black man beat time, and my father never stopped looking at you

and listening—Friedel too. I will ask them if they remember."

He laughed again at the reminiscence, and took my hand, and asked me if I remembered, so that it was with difficulty that I steadied my voice and kept my eyes from running over as I answered him. Gräfin Hildegarde behind wrung her hands and turned to the window. He did not advance any reminiscences of what had happened since he came to the Schloss.

There was no doubt that our Sigmund was very ill. A visitation of scarlet fever, of the worst kind, was raging in Lahnburg, and in the hamlet of Rothenfels, which lay about the gates of the Schloss.

Sigmund, some ten days before, had ridden with his uncle, and waited on his pony for some time outside a row of cottages, while the Count visited one of his old servants, a man who had become an octogenarian in the service of his family, and upon whom Graf Bruno periodically shed the light of his countenance.

It was scarcely to be doubted that the boy

had taken the infection then and there, and the doctor did not conceal that he had the complaint in its worst form, suppressed, and that his recovery admitted of the gravest doubts.

A short time convinced me that I must not again leave the child till the illness were decided in one way or another. He was mine now, and I felt myself in the place of Eugen, as I stood beside his bed, and told him the hard truth—that his father was not there, nor Friedhelm, nor Karl, for whom he also asked, but only I.

The day passed on. A certain conviction was growing every hour stronger with me. An incident at last decided it. I had scarcely left Sigmund's side for eight or nine hours, but I had seen nothing of the Count, nor heard his voice, nor had any mention been made of him, and remembering how he adored the boy, I was surprised.

At last Gräfin Hildegarde, after a brief absence, came into the room, and with a white face and parted lips, said to me in a half-whisper:

"*Liebe* Miss Wedderburn, will you do something for me? Will you speak to my husband?"

"To your husband!" I ejaculated.

She bowed.

"He longs to see Sigmund, but dare not come. For me, I have hardly dared to go near him since the little one began to be ill. He believes that Sigmund will die, and that he will be his murderer, having taken him out that day. I have often spoken to him about making *der Arme* ride too far, and now the sight of me reminds him of it; he cannot endure to look at me. Heaven help me! Why was I ever born?"

She turned away without tears—tears were not in her line—and I went, much against my will, to find the Graf.

He was in his study. Was that the same man, I wondered, whom I had seen the very day before, so strong, and full of pride and life? He raised a haggard, white, and ghastly face to me, which had aged and fallen in unspeakably. He made an effort, and rose with politeness as I came in.

"*Mein Fräulein*, you are loading us with obligations. It is quite unheard of."

But no thanks were implied in the tone—only bitterness. He was angry that I should be in the place he dared not come to.

If I had not been raised by one supreme fear above all smaller ones, I should have been afraid of this haggard, eager-looking old man—for he did look very old in his anguish. I could see the rage of jealousy with which he regarded me, and I am not naturally fond of encountering an old wolf who has starved.

But I used my utmost efforts to prevail upon him to visit his nephew, and at last succeeded. I piloted him to Sigmund's room; led him to the boy's bed-side. The sick child's eyes were closed, but he presently opened them. The uncle was stooping over him, his rugged face all working with emotion, and his voice broken as he murmured:

"*Ach, mein Liebling!* art thou then so ill?"

With a kind of shuddering cry, the boy

pushed him away with both hands, crying:

"Go away! I want my father—my father, my *father*, I say! Where is he? Why do you not fetch him? You are a bad man, and you hate him."

Then I *was* frightened. The Count recoiled; his face turned deathly white—livid; his fist clenched. He glared down upon the now unrecognising young face, and stuttered forth something, paused, then said, in a low, distinct voice, which shook me from head to foot:

"So! Better he *should* die. The brood is worthy the nest it sprang from. Where is our blood, that he whines after that hound—that *hound?*"

With which, and with a fell look around, he departed, leaving Sigmund oblivious of all that had passed, utterly indifferent and unconscious, and me shivering with fear at the outburst I had seen.

But it seemed to me that my charge was worse. I left him for a few moments, and seeking out the Countess, spoke my mind.

"Frau Gräfin, Eugen must be sent for. I fear that Sigmund is going to die, and I dare not let him die without sending for his father."

"I dare not!" said the Countess.

She had met her husband, and was flung, unnerved, upon a couch, her hand over her heart.

"But I dare, and I must do it!" said I, secretly wondering at myself. "I shall telegraph for him."

"If my husband knew!" she breathed.

"I cannot help it," said I. "Is the poor child to die amongst people who profess to *love* him, with the one wish ungratified which he has been repeating ever since he began to be ill? I do not understand such love; I call it horrible inhumanity."

"For Eugen to enter this house again!" she said in a whisper.

"I would to God that there were any other head as noble under its roof!" was my magniloquent and thoroughly earnest aspiration. "Well, *gnädige Frau*, will you arrange this matter, or shall I?"

"I dare not," she moaned, half distracted; "I dare not—but I will do nothing to prevent you. Use the whole household; they are at your command."

I lost not an instant in writing out a telegram and despatching it by a man on horseback to Lahnburg. I summoned Eugen briefly:

"Sigmund is ill. I am here. Come to us."

I saw the man depart, and then I went and told the Countess what I had done. She turned, if possible, a shade paler; then said:

"I am not responsible for it."

Then I left the poor pale lady to still her beating heart and kill her deadly apprehensions in the embroidery of the lily of the field and the modest violet.

No change in the child's condition. A lethargy had fallen upon him. That awful stupor, with the dark, flushed cheek and heavy breath, was to me more ominous than the restlessness of fever.

I sat down and calculated. My telegram

might be in Eugen's hands in the course of an hour.

When could he be here? Was it possible that he might arrive this night? I obtained the German equivalent for Bradshaw, and studied it till I thought I had made out that, supposing Eugen to receive the telegram in the shortest possible time, he *might* be here by half-past eleven that night. It was now five in the afternoon. Six hours and a half—and at the end of that time his non-arrival might tell me that he could not be here before the morrow.

I sat still, and now that the deed was done gave myself up, with my usual enlightenment and discretion, to fears and apprehensions. The terrible look and tone of Graf von Rothenfels returned to my mind in full force. Clearly it was just the most dangerous thing in the world for Eugen to do—to put in an appearance at the present time. But another glance at Sigmund somewhat reassured me. In wondering whether girl had ever before been placed in such a bizarre situation as mine, darkness overtook me.

Sigmund moved restlessly and moaned, stretching out little hot hands, and saying, "Father!" I caught those hands to my lips, and knew that I had done right.



CHAPTER V.

VINDICATED.

IT was a wild night. Driving clouds kept hiding and revealing the stormy-looking moon. I was out of doors. I could not remain in the house; it had felt too small for me, but now nature felt too large. I dimly saw the huge pile of the Schloss defined against the grey light; sometimes when the moon unveiled herself it started out, clear, and black, and grim. I saw a light in a corner window—that was Sigmund's room; another in a room below—that was the Graf's study, and there the terrible man sat. I heard the wind moan amongst the trees, heard the great dogs

baying from the kennels; from an open window came rich, low, mellow sounds. Old Brunken was in the music-room, playing to himself upon his violoncello. That was a movement from the *Grand Septuor*—the second movement, which is, if one may use such an expression, *painfully* beautiful. I bethought myself of the woods which lay hidden from me, the vast avenues, the lonely tanks, the grotesque statues, and that terrible figure with its arms cast upward, at the end of the long walk, and I shivered faintly.

I was some short distance down the principal avenue, and dared not go any farther. A sudden dread of the loneliness and the night-voices came upon me; my heart beating thickly, I turned to go back to the house. I would try to comfort poor Countess Hildegarde in her watching and her fears.

But that is a step near me. Some one comes up the avenue, with foot that knows its windings, its turns and twists, its ups and downs.

"Eugen!" I said tremulously.

A sudden pause—a stop; then he said, with a kind of laugh:

"Witchcraft—*Zauberei!*" and was going on.

But now I knew his whereabouts, and coming up to him, touched his arm.

"This, however, is reality!" he exclaimed, enfolding me and kissing me as he hurried on. "May, how is he?"

"Just the same," said I, clinging to him. "Oh, thank heaven that you are come!"

"I drove to the gates, and sent the fellow away. But what art thou doing alone at the Ghost's Corner on a stormy night?"

We were still walking fast towards the Schloss. My heart was beating fast, half with fear of what was impending, half with intensity of joy at hearing his voice again, and knowing what that last letter had told me.

As we emerged upon the great terrace before the house Eugen made one (the only one) momentary pause, pressed my arm, and bit his lips. I knew the meaning of it all. Then we passed quickly on. We met no one

in the great stone hall—no one on the stairway or along the passages—straight he held his way, and I with him.

We entered the room. Eugen's eyes leapt swiftly to his child's face. I saw him pass his hand over his mouth. I withdrew my hand from his arm and stood aside, feeling a tremulous thankfulness that he was here, and that that restless plaining would at last be hushed in satisfaction.

A delusion! The face over which my lover bent did not brighten; nor the eyes recognise him. The child did not know the father for whom he had yearned out his little heart—he did not hear the half-frantic words spoken by that father as he flung himself upon him, kissing him, beseeching him, conjuring him with every foolish word of fondness that he could think of, to speak, answer, look up once again.

Then fear, terror overcame the man—for the first time I saw him look pale with apprehension.

"Not this cup—not this!" muttered he. "*Gott im Himmel!* anything short of this —

I will give him up—leave him—anything—only let him live!"

He had flung himself, unnerved, trembling, upon a chair by the bedside—his face buried in his hands. I saw the sweat stand upon his brow—I could do nothing to help—nothing but wish despairingly that some blessed miracle would reverse the condition of the child and me—lay me low in death upon that bed—place him safe and sound in his father's arms.

Is it not hard, you father of many children, to lose *one* of them? Do you not grudge Death his prize? But this man had but the one; the love between them was such a love as one meets perhaps once in a lifetime. The child's life had been a mourning to him, the father's a burden, ever since they had parted.

I felt it strange that *I* should be trying to comfort *him*, and yet it was so: it was his brow which leaned on my shoulder; it was he who was faint with anguish, so that he could scarce see or speak—his hand that was cold and nerveless. It was I who said:

"Do not despair: I hope still."

"If he is dying," said Eugen, "he shall die in my arms."

With which, as if the idea were a dreary kind of comfort, he started up, folded Sigmund in a shawl, and lifted him out of bed, enfolding him in his arms, and pillowing his head upon his breast.

It was a terrible moment, yet, as I clung to his arm, and with him looked into *our* darling's face, I felt that Von Francius' words, spoken long ago to my sister, contained a deep truth. This joy, so like a sorrow—would I have parted with it? A thousand times no!

Whether the motion and movement roused him, or whether that were the crisis of some change, I know not. Sigmund's eyes opened. He bent them upon the face above him, and after a pause of reflection said, in a voice whose utter satisfaction passed anything I had ever heard: "My own father!" released a pair of little wasted arms from his covering, and clasped them round Eugen's neck, putting his face close to his, and kissing him

as if no number of kisses could ever satisfy him.

Upon this scene, as Eugen stood in the middle of the room, his head bent down—a smile upon his face which no ultimate griefs could for the moment quench, there entered the Countess.

Her greeting, after six years of absence, separation, belief in his dishonesty, was a strange one. She came quickly forward, laid her hand on his arm, and said:

"Eugen, it is dreadfully infectious! Don't kiss the child in that way, or you will take the fever and be laid up too."

He looked up, and at his look a shock passed across her face; with pallid cheeks and parted lips she gazed at him, speechless.

His mind, too, seemed to bridge the gulf—it was in a strange tone that he answered:

"Ah, Hildegarde! What does it matter what becomes of me? Leave me this!"

"No, not that, Eugen," said I, going up to him, and I suppose something in my eyes

moved him, for he gave the child into my arms in silence.

The Countess had stood looking at him. She strove for silence; sought tremulously after coldness, but in vain.

"Eugen!—" She came nearer, and looked more closely at him. "*Herrgott!* how you are altered! What a meeting! I—can it be six years ago?—and now—oh!" Her voice broke into a very wail, "We loved you—*why did you deceive us?*"

My heart stood still. Would he stand this test? It was the hardest he had had. Gräfin Hildegarde had been—was dear to him. That he was dear to her—intensely dear; that love for him was entwined about her very heart-strings stood confessed now. "*Why did you deceive us?*" It sounded more like, "Tell us we my trust you; make us happy again!" One word from him, and the poor sad lady would have banished from her heart the long-staying, unwelcome guest—belief in his falseness, and closed it away from her for ever.

He was spared the dreadful necessity of

answering her. A timid summons from her maid at the door told her the Count wanted to speak to her, and she left us quickly.

* * * * *

Sigmund did not die: he recovered, and lives now. But with that I am not at present concerned.

It was the afternoon following that never-to-be-forgotten night. I had left Eugen watching beside Sigmund, who was sleeping, his hand jealously holding two of his father's fingers.

I intended to call at Frau Mittendorf's door to say that I could not yet return there, and when I came back, said Eugen, he would have something to tell me; he was going to speak with his brother—to tell him that we should be married, "and to speak about Sigmund," he added decisively. "I will not risk such a thing as this again. If you had not been here he might have died without my knowing it. I feel myself absolved from all obligation to let him remain. My child's happiness shall not be further sacrificed."

With this understanding I left him. I

went towards the Countess's room, to speak to her, and tell her of Sigmund before I went out. I heard voices ere I entered the room, and *when* I entered it I stood still, and a sickly apprehension clutched my very heart. There stood my evil genius—the *böser Geist* of my lover's fate—Anna Sartorius. And the Count and Countess were present, apparently waiting for her to begin to speak.

"You are here," said the Gräfin to me. "I was just about to send for you. This lady says she knows you."

"She does," said I hesitatingly.

Anna looked at me. There was gravity in her face, and the usual cynical smile in her eyes.

"You are surprised to see me," said she. "You will be still more surprised to hear that I have journeyed all the way from Elberthal to Lahnburg on your account, and for your benefit."

I did not believe her, and composing myself as well as I could, sat down. After all, what could she do to harm me? She could not rob me of Eugen's heart, and she

had already done her worst against him and his fair name.

Anna had a strong will: she exerted it. Graf Bruno was looking in some surprise at the unexpected guest; the Countess sat rigidly upright, with a puzzled look, as if at the sight of Anna she recalled some far-past scene. Anna compelled their attention; she turned to me, saying:

"Please remain here, Miss Wedderburn. What I have to say concerns you as much as any one here. You wonder who I am, and what business I have to intrude myself upon you," she added to the others.

"I confess——" began the Countess, and Anna went on:

"You, *gnädige Frau*, have spoken to me before, and I to you. I see you remember, or feel you ought to remember me. I will recall the occasion of our meeting to your mind. You once called at my father's house —he was a music teacher—to ask about lessons for some friend or protégée of yours. My father was engaged at the moment, and I invited you to my sitting-room and en-

deavoured to begin a conversation with you. You were very distant and very proud, scarcely deigning to answer me. When my father came into the room, I left it. But I could not help laughing at your treatment of me. You little knew from your shut-up, *cossue* existence amongst the lofty ones of the earth, what influence even such insignificant persons as I might have upon your lot. At that time I was the intimate friend of, and in close correspondence with, a person who afterwards became one of your family. Her name was Vittoria Leopardi, and she married your brother-in-law, Graf Eugen."

The plain-spoken, plain-looking woman had her way. She had the same power as that which shone in the "glittering eye" of the Ancient Mariner. Whether we liked or not we gave her our attention. All were listening now, and we listened to the end.

"Vittoria Leopardi was the Italian governess at General von ——'s in ——. At one time she had several music lessons from my father. That was how I became acquainted

with her. She was very beautiful—almost as beautiful as you, Miss Wedderburn, and I, dull and plain myself, have a keen appreciation of beauty and of the gentleness which does *not* always accompany it. When I first knew her she was lonely and strange, and I tried to befriend her. I soon began to learn what a singular mixture of sordid worldliness and vacant weakmindedness dwelt behind her fair face. She wrote to me often, for she was one of the persons who must have *some one* to whom to relate their 'triumphs' and conquests, and I suppose I was the only person she could get to listen to her.

"At that time—the time you called at our house, *gnädige Frau*—her epistles were decidedly tedious. What sense she had—there was never too much of it—was completely eclipsed. At last came the announcement that her noble and gallant Uhlan had proposed, and been accepted—naturally. She told me what he was, and his possessions and prospects; his chief merit in her eyes appeared to be that he would let her do *anything* she liked, and release her from the drudgery of

teaching, for which she never had the least affinity. She hated children. She never on any occasion hinted that she loved him very much.

"In due time the marriage, as you all know, came off. She almost dropped me then, but never completely so; I suppose she had that instinct which stupid people often have as to the sort of people who may be of use to them sometime. I received no invitations to her house. She used awkwardly to apologise for the negligence sometimes, and say she was so busy, and it would be no compliment to me to ask me to meet all those stupid people of whom the house was always full.

"That did not trouble me much, though I loved her none the better for it. She had become more a study to me now than anything I really cared for. Occasionally I used to go and see her, in the morning, before she had left her room; and once, and once only, I met her husband in the corridor. He was hastening away to his duty, and scarcely saw me as he hurried past. Of course I knew

him by sight as well as possible. Who did not? Occasionally she came to me to recount her triumphs and make me jealous. She did not wish to reign supreme in her husband's heart; she wished idle men to pay her compliments. Everybody in —— knew of the extravagance of that household, and the reckless, neck-or-nothing habits of its master. People were indignant with him that he did not reform. I say it would have been easier for him to find his way alone up the Matterhorn in the dark than to reform—after his marriage.

"There had been hope for him before—there was none afterwards. A pretty inducement to reform, she offered him! I knew that woman through and through, and I tell you that never lived a more selfish, feeble, vain, and miserable thing. All was self—self—self. When she was mated to a man who never did think of self—whose one joy was to be giving, whose generosity was no less a by-word than his recklessness, who was delighted if she expressed a wish, and would move heaven and earth to gratify it; the more

eagerly the more unreasonable it was—*mes amis*, I think it is easy to guess the end —the end was ruin. I watched it coming on, and I thought of you, Frau Gräfin. Vittoria was expecting her confinement in the course of a few months. I never heard her express a hope as to the coming child, never a word of joy, never a thought as to the wider cares which a short time would bring to her. She did say often, with a sigh, that women with young children were so tied: they could not do this, and they could not do that. She was in great excitement when she was invited to come here: in great triumph when she returned.

"Eugen, she said, was a fool not to conciliate his brother and that doting old saint (her words, *gnädige Frau*, not mine) more than he did. It was evident that they would do anything for him if he only flattered them, but he was so insanely downright—she called it stupid, she said. The idea of missing such advantages when a few words of common politeness would have secured them. I may add that what she called 'common politeness'

was just the same thing that I called smooth hypocrisy.

"Very shortly after this her child was born. I did not see her then. Her husband lost all his money on a race, and came to smash, as you English say. She wrote to me. She was in absolute need of money, she said; Eugen had not been able to give her any. He had said they must retrench. Retrench! was that what she married him for? There was a set of turquoises that she must have, or another woman would get them, and then she would die. And her milliner, a most unreasonable woman, had sent word that she must be paid.

"So she was grumbling in a letter which I received one afternoon, and the next I was frightfully startled to see her herself. She came in, and said smilingly that she was going to ask a favour of me. Would I take her cab on to the bank and get a cheque cashed for her? She did not want to go there herself. And then she explained how her brother-in-law had given her a cheque for a thousand thalers—was it not kind of him?

It really did not enter my head at the moment to think there was anything wrong about the cheque. She had indorsed it, and I took it, received the money for it, and brought it to her. She trembled so as she took it, and was so remarkably quiet about it, that it suddenly flashed upon my mind that there must be something not as it ought to be about it.

"I asked her a question or two, and she said, deliberately contradicting herself, that the Herr Graf had not given it to her, but to her husband, and then she went away, and I was sure I should hear more about it. I did. She wrote to me in the course of a few days saying she wished she were dead, since Eugen, by his wickedness, had destroyed every chance of happiness; she might as well be a widow. She sent me a package of letters—my letters—and asked me to keep them, together with some other things, an old desk amongst the rest. She had no means of destroying them all, and she did not choose to carry them to Rothenfels, whither she was going, to be buried alive with those awful people.

"I accepted the charge. For five—no, six years, the desk, the papers, everything lay with some other possessions of mine which I could not carry about with me on the wandering life I led after my father's death—stored in an old trunk in the lumber-room of a cousin's house. I visited that house last week.

"Certain circumstances which have occurred of late years induced me to look over those papers. I burnt the old bundle of letters from myself to her, and then I looked through the desk. In a pigeon-hole I found these."

She handed some pieces of paper to Graf Bruno, who looked at them. I, too, have seen them since. They bore the imitations of different signatures: her husband's, Graf Bruno's, that of Anna Sartorius, and others which I did not know.

The same conviction as that which had struck Anna flashed into the eyes of Graf von Rothenfels.

"I found those," repeated Anna, "and I knew in a second who was the culprit. He,

your brother, is no criminal. *She* forged the signature of the Herr Graf—"

"*Who* forged the signature of the Herr Graf?" asked a voice which caused me to start up, which brought all our eyes from Anna's face, upon which they had been fastened, and showed us Eugen standing in the doorway, with compressed lips and eyes that looked from one to the other of us anxiously.

"Your wife," said Anna calmly. And before any one could speak she went on: "I have helped to circulate the lie about you, Herr Graf"—she spoke to Eugen—"for I disliked you; I disliked your family, and I disliked, or rather wished to punish, Miss Wedderburn for her behaviour to me. But I firmly believed the story I circulated. The moment I knew the truth I determined to set you right. Perhaps I was pleased to be able to circumvent your plans. I considered that if I told the truth to Friedhelm Helfen he would be as silent as yourself, *because* you chose to be silent. The same with May Wedderburn, therefore I decided to come to

head-quarters at once. It is useless for you to try to appear guilty any longer," she added mockingly. "You can tell them all the rest, and I will wish you good-afternoon."

She was gone. From that day to this I have never seen her nor heard of her again. Probably with her power over us her interest in us ceased.

Meanwhile I had released myself from the spell which held me, and gone to the Countess. Something very like fear held me from approaching Eugen.

Count Bruno had gone to his brother, and touched his shoulder. Eugen looked up. Their eyes met. It just flashed into my mind that after six years of separation the first words were—must be—words of reconciliation, of forgiveness asked on the one side, eagerly extended on the other.

"Eugen!" in a trembling voice, and then, with a positive sob, "canst thou forgive?"

"My brother—I have not resented. I could not. Honour in thee, as honour in me——"

"But that thou wert doubted, hated, mistak——"

But another had asserted herself. The Countess had come to herself again, and going up to him, looked him full in the face and kissed him.

"Now I can die happy! What folly, Eugen! and folly like none but thine. I might have known——"

A faint smile crossed his lips. For all the triumphant vindication, he looked very pallid.

"I have often wondered, Hildegarde, how so proud a woman as you could so soon accept the worthlessness of a pupil on whom she had spent such pains as you upon me. I learnt my best notions of honour and chivalry from you. You might have credited me rather with trying to carry the lesson out than with plucking it away and casting it from me at the first opportunity."

"You have much to forgive," said she.

"Eugen, you came to see me on business," said his brother.

Eugen turned to me. I turned hot and then cold. This was a terrible ordeal indeed. He seemed metamorphosed into an exceedingly grand personage as he came to me, took my hand, and said, very proudly and very gravely:

"The first part of my business related to Sigmund. It will not need to be discussed now. The rest was to tell you that this young lady—in spite of having heard all that could be said against me—was still not afraid to assert her intention to honour me by becoming my wife and sharing my fate. Now that she has learnt the truth—May, do you still care for me enough to marry me?"

"If so," interrupted his brother, before I could speak, "let me add my petition and that of my wife—do you allow me, Hildegarde?"

"Indeed yes, yes!"

"That she will honour us and make us happy by entering our family, which can only gain by the acquisition of such beauty and excellence."

The idea of being entreated by Graf Bruno to marry his brother almost overpowered me. I looked at Eugen and stammered out something inaudible, confused, too, by the look he gave me.

He was changed ; he was more formidable now than before, and he led me silently up to his brother without a word, upon which Count Bruno crowned my confusion by uttering some more very Grandisonian words and gravely saluting my cheek. That was certainly a terrible moment, but from that day to this I have loved better and better my haughty brother-in-law.

Half in consideration for me, I believe, the Countess began :

"But I want to know, Eugen, about this. I don't quite understand yet, how you managed to shift the blame upon yourself."

"Perhaps he does not want to tell," said I hastily.

"Yes ; since the truth is known, I may tell the rest," said he. "It was a very simple matter. After all was lost, my only

ray of comfort was that I could pay my debts by selling everything, and throwing up my commission. But when I thought of my wife I felt a devil. I suppose that is the feeling which the devils do experience in place of love—at least Heine says so :

"'Die Teufel nennen es Höllenqual,
Die Menschen nennen es Liebe.'

"I kept it from her as long as I could. It was a week after Sigmund was born that at last one day I *had* to tell her. I actually looked to her for advice, help. It was tolerably presumptuous in me, I must say, after what I had brought her to. She brought me to reason. May heaven preserve men from needing such lessons! She reproached me—ay, she *did* reproach me. I thank my good genius, or whatever it is that looks after us, that I could set my teeth and not answer her a syllable."

"The minx!" said the Countess aside to me. "I would have shaken her."

"'What was she to do without a *groschen?*' she concluded, and I could only say that I

had had thoughts of dropping my military career and taking to music in good earnest. I had never been able to neglect it, even in my worst time, for it was a passion with me. She said :

"'A composer—a beggar!' That was hard.

"I asked her, 'Will you not help me?'

"'Never, to degrade yourself in that manner,' she assured me.

"Considering that I had deserved my punishment, I left her. I sat up all night, I remember, thinking over what I had brought her to, and wondering what I could do for her. I wondered if you, Bruno, would help *her* and let me go away and work out my punishment, for, believe me, I never thought of shirking it. I *had* been most effectually brought to reason, and your example, and yours, Hildegarde, had taught me a different kind of moral fibre to that.

"I brought your note about the cheque to Vittoria, and asked her if she knew anything about it. She looked at me, and in that instant I knew the truth. She did not once attempt to deny it. I do not know what, in

my horrible despair and shame, I may have said or done.

"I was brought to my senses by seeing her cowering before me, with her hands before her face, and begging me not to kill her. I felt what a brute I must have been, but that kind of brutality has been knocked out of me long ago. I raised her, and asked her to forgive me, and bade her keep silence and see no one, and I would see that she did not suffer for it.

"Everything seemed to stand clearly before me. If I had kept straight, the poor ignorant thing would never have been tempted to such a thing. I settled my whole course in half an hour, and have never departed from it since.

"I wrote that letter to you, and went and read it to my wife. I told her that I could never forgive *myself* for having caused her such unhappiness, and that I was going to release her from me. I only dropped a vague hint about the boy at first; I was stooping over his crib to say good-bye to him. She said, 'What am *I* to do with him?' I caught

at the idea, and she easily let me take him. I asked Hugo von Meilingen to settle affairs for me; and left that night. Thanks to you, Bruno, the story never got abroad. The rest you know."

"What did you tell Hugo von Meilingen?"

"Only that I had made a mess of everything and broken my wife's heart, which he did not seem to believe. He was staunch. He settled up everything. Some day I will thank him for it. For two years I travelled about a good deal. Sigmund has been more a citizen of the world than he knows. I had so much facility of execution——"

"So much *genius*, you mean," I interposed.

"That I never had any difficulty in getting an engagement. I saw a wonderful amount of life of a certain kind, and learnt most thoroughly to despise my own past, and to entertain a thorough contempt for those who are still leading such lives. I have learnt German history in my banishment. I have lived with our true heroes—the lower middle-classes."

"Well, well! You were always a

radical, Eugen," said the Count indulgently.

"At last, at Köln I obtained the situation of first violinist in the Elberthal Kapelle, and I went over there one wet October afternoon, and saw the director, Von Francius. He was busy, and referred me to the man who was next below me, Friedhelm Helfen."

Eugen paused, and choked down some little emotion ere he added:

"You must know him. I trust to have his friendship till death separate us. He is a nobleman of nature's most careful making —a knight *sans peur et sans reproche.* When Sigmund came here it was he who saved me from doing something desperate or drivelling —there is not much of a step between the two. Fräulein Sartorius, who seems to have a peculiar disposition, took it into her head to confront me with a charge of my guilt at a public place. Friedhelm never wavered, despite my shame and my inability to deny the charge."

"Oh dear, how beautiful!" said the Countess

in tears. "We must have him over here and see a great deal of him."

"We must certainly know him, and that soon," said Count Bruno.

At this juncture I, from mingled motives, stole from the room, and found my way to Sigmund's bedside, where also joy awaited me. The stupor and the restlessness had alike vanished: he was in a deep sleep. I knelt down by the bedside and remained there long.

Nothing, then, was to be as I had planned it. There would be no poverty, no shame to contend against—no struggle to make, except the struggle up to the standard—so fearfully severe and unapproachable, set up by my own husband. Set up and *acted upon* by him. How could I ever attain it or anything near it? Should I not be constantly shocking him by coarse, gross notions as to the needlessness of this or that fine point of conduct? by my ill-defined ideas as to a code of honour—my slovenly ways of looking at questions?

It was such a fearful height, this to which he had carried his notions and behaviour in

the matter of chivalry and loyalty. How was I ever to help him to carry it out, and, moreover, to bring up this child before me, and perhaps children of my own in the same rules ?

It was no doubt a much more brilliant destiny which actually awaited me, than any which I had anticipated—the wife of a nobleman, with the traditions of a long line of noblemen and noblewomen to support, and a husband with the most impossible ideas upon the subject.

I felt afraid. I thought of that poor, vain, selfish first wife, and I wondered if ever the time might come when I might fall in his eyes as she had fallen, for scrupulous though he was to cast no reproach upon her, I felt keenly that he despised her, that had she lived after that dreadful discovery he would never have loved her again. It was awful to think of. True, I should never commit forgery ; but I might, without knowing it, fail in some other way, and then—woe to me !

Thus dismally cogitating I was roused by

a touch on my shoulder and a kiss on the top of my head. Eugen was leaning over me, laughing.

"You have been saying your prayers so long that I was sure you must be asking too much."

I confided some of my doubts and fears to him, for with his actual presence that dreadful height of morality seemed to dwindle down. He was human too—quick, impulsive, a very mortal. And he said:

"I would ask thee one thing, May. Thou dost not seem to see what makes all the difference. I loved Vittoria: I longed to make some sacrifice for her, would she but have met me. But she could not: poor girl! She did not love me."

"Well?"

"Well! *Mein Engel*—you do," said he, laughing.

"Oh, I see!" said I, feeling myself blushing violently. Yes, it was true. Our union should be different from that former one. After all it was pleasant to

find that the high tragedy which we had so wisely planned for ourselves had made a *faux pas* and come ignominiously to ground.



CHAPTER VI.

"And surely, when all this is past
They shall not want their rest at last."

ON the 23rd of December—I will not say how few or how many years after those doings and that violent agitation which my friend Gräfin May has striven to make coherent in the last chapter—I, with my greatcoat on my arm, stood waiting for the train which was to bear me ten miles away from the sleepy old musical ducal *Hauptstadt,* in which I am *Herzoglicher Kapellmeister,* to Rothenfels, where I was bidden to spend Christmas. I had not long to wait. Having ascertained that my *bag* was safe, in which reposed divers

humble proofs of my affection for the friends of the past, I looked leisurely out as the train came in, for a second-class carriage, and very soon found what I wanted. I shook hands with an acquaintance, and leaned out of the window, talking to him till the train started. Then for the first time I began to look at my fellow-traveller; a lady, and most distinctly *not* one of my own countrywomen, who, whatever else they may excel in, emphatically do not know how to clothe themselves for travelling. Her veil was down, but her face was turned towards me, and I thought I knew something of the grand sweep of the splendid shoulders, and majestic bearing of the stately form. She soon raised her veil, and looking at me said, with a grave bow:

"Herr Helfen, how do you do?"

"Ah, pardon me, *gnädige Frau;* for the moment I did not recognise you. I hope you are well."

"Quite well, thank you," said she, with grave courtesy; but I saw that her beautiful face was thin and worn, her pallor greater than ever.

She had never been a person much given to mirthfulness; but now she looked as if all smiles had passed for ever from her lips—a certain secret sat upon them, and closed them in an outline, sweet, but utterly impenetrable.

"You are going to Rothenfels, I presume?" she said.

"Yes. And you also?"

"I also—somewhat against my will; but I did not want to hurt my sister's feelings. It is the first time I have left home since my husband's death."

I bowed. Her face did not alter. Calm, sad, and staid—whatever storms had once shaken that proud heart, they were lulled for ever now.

Two years ago Adelaide von Francius had buried keen grief and sharp anguish, together with vivid hope or great joy, with her noble husband, whom we had mourned bitterly then, whom we yet mourn in our hearts, and whom we shall continue to mourn as long as we live.

May's passionate conviction that he and

she should meet again had been fulfilled. They had met, and each had found the other unchanged; and Adelaide had begun to yield to the conviction that her sister's love was love, pure and simple, and not pity. Since his death she had continued to live in the town in which their married life had been passed—a life which for her was just beginning to be happy—that is to say, she was just learning to allow herself to be happy, in the firm assurance of his unalterable love and devotion, when the summons came: a sharp attack, a short illness, all over—eyes closed, lips too, silent before her for evermore.

It has often been my fate to hear criticisms both on Von Francius and his wife, and upon their conduct. This I know, that she never forgave herself the step she had taken in her despair. Her pride never recovered from the burden laid upon it—that she had taken the initiative, had followed the man who had said farewell to her. Bad her lot was to be, sad, and joyless, whether in its gilded cage, or linked with the man whom she loved, but

to be with whom she had had to pay so terrible a price. I have never heard her complain of life and the world; yet she can find neither very sweet, for she is an extremely proud woman, who has made two terrible failures in her affairs.

Von Francius, before he died, had made a mark not to be erased in the hearts of his musical compatriots. Had he lived—but that is vain! Still, one feels—one cannot but feel—that, as his widow said to me, with matter-of-fact composure:

"He was much more hardly to be spared than such a person as I, Herr Helfen. If I might have died and left him to enrich and gladden the world, I should have felt that I had not made such a mess of everything after all."

Yet she never referred to him as "my poor husband," or by any of those softening terms by which some people approach the name of a dead dear one; all the same we knew quite well that with him life had died for her.

Since his death, she and I had been in fre-

quent communication; she was editing a new edition of his works, for which, after his death, there had been an instant call. It had lately been completed; and the music of our former friend shall, if I mistake not, become, in the best and highest sense of the word, popular music—the people's music. I had been her eager and, she was pleased to say, able assistant in the work.

We journeyed on together through the winter country, and I glanced at her now and then—at the still pale face which rose above her English-fashioned sealskin, and wondered how it was that some faces, though never so young and beautiful, have written upon them in unmistakable characters, "The End," as one saw upon *her* face. Still, we talked about all kinds of matters—musical, private, and public. I asked if she went out at all.

"Only to concerts with the Von ——s, who have been friends of mine ever since I went to ——," she replied; and then the train rolled into the station of Lahnburg.

There was a group of faces I knew waiting to meet us.

"Ah! there is my sister Stella," said Adelaide in a low voice. "How she is altered! And that is May's husband, I suppose. I remember his face now that I see it."

We had been caught sight of. Four people came crowding round us. Eugen—my eyes fell upon him first—we grasped hands silently. His wife, looking lovelier than ever in her winter furs and feathers. A tall boy in a sealskin cap—my Sigmund—who had been hanging on his father's arm, and whose eyes welcomed me more volubly than his tongue, which was never given to excessive wagging.

May and Frau von Francius went home in a carriage which Sigmund, under the direction of an awful-looking *Kutscher,* drove.

Stella, Eugen, and I walked to Rothenfels, and they quarrelled, as they always did, while I listened and gave an encouraging word to each in turn. Stella Wedderburn was very beautiful; and after spending Christmas at Rothenfels, she was going home to be married. Eugen, May, and Sigmund

were going too, for the first time since May's marriage.

Graf Bruno that year had temporarily abdicated his throne, and Eugen had been constituted host for the season. The guests were his and his wife's; the arrangements were his, and the entertainment fell to his share.

Gräfin Hildegarde looked a little amazed at such of her guests, for instance, as Karl Linders. She had got over the first shock of seeing me a regular visitor in the house, and was pleased to draw me aside on this occasion and inform me that really that young man, Herr Linders, was presentable—quite presentable—and never forgot himself; he had handed her into her carriage yesterday, really *quite* creditably. No doubt it was long friendship with Eugen which had given him that extra polish.

"Indeed, Frau Gräfin, he was always like that. It is natural."

"He is very presentable, really — very. But as a friend of Eugen's," and she smiled condescendingly upon me, "he would naturally be so."

In truth, Karl was Karl. "Time had not thinned *his* flowing locks;" he was as handsome, as impulsive, and as true as ever; had added two babies to his responsibilities, who, with his beloved *Frau Gemahlin*, had likewise been bidden to this festivity, but had declined to quit the stove and private Christmas-tree of home life. He wore no more short jackets now; his sister Gretchen was engaged to a young doctor, and Karl's head was growing higher—as it deserved—for it had no mean or shady deeds to bow it.

The company then consisted *in toto* of Graf and Gräfin von Rothenfels, who, I must record it, both looked full ten years younger and better since their prodigal was returned to them, of Stella Wedderburn, Frau von Francius, Karl Linders, and Friedhelm Helfen. May, as I said, looked lovelier than ever. It was easy to see that she was the darling of the elder brother and his wife. She was a radiant, bright creature, yet her deepest affections were given to sad people—to her husband, to her sister Adelaide, to Countess Hildegarde.

She and Eugen are well mated. It is true he is not a very cheerful man—his face is melancholy. In his eyes is a shadow which never wholly disappears—lines upon his broad and tranquil brow which are indelible. He has honour and titles, and a name clean and high before men, but it was not always so. That terrible bringing to reason—that six years' grinding lesson of suffering, self-suppression—ay, self-effacement—have left their marks, a "shadow plain to see," and will never leave him. He is a different man from the outcast who stepped forth into the night with a weird upon him, nor ever looked back till it was dreed out in darkness to its utmost term.

He has tasted of the sorrows—the self-brought sorrows which make merry men into sober ones, the sorrows which test a man and prove his character to be of gold or of dross, and therefore he is grave. Grave too is the son, who is more worshipped by both him and his wife than any of their other children. Sigmund von Rothenfels is what outsiders call "a strange, incomprehensible child;"

seldom smiles, and has no child friends. His friends are his father and "Mother May"—*Mütterchen* he calls her; and it is quaint sometimes to see how on an equality the three meet and associate. His notions of what is fit for a man to be and do, he takes from his father; his ideal woman—I am sure he has one—would, I believe, turn out to be a subtle and impossible compound of May and his Aunt Hildegarde.

We sometimes speculate as to what he will turn out. Perhaps the musical genius which his father will not bring before the world in himself, may one day astonish that world in Sigmund. It is certain that his very life seems bound up in the art, and in that house and that circle it must be a very Caliban, or something yet lower, which could resist the influence.

One day May, Eugen, Karl, and I, repaired to the music-room and played together the Fourth Symphonie and some of Schumann's *Kinderscenen,* but May began to cry before it was over, and the rest of us had thoughts that did lie too deep for tears—

thoughts of that far back afternoon of Carnival Monday, and how we "made a sunshine in a shady place"—of all that came before—and after.

Between me and Eugen there has never come a cloud, nor the faintest shadow of one. Builded upon days passed together in storm and sunshine, weal and woe, good report and evil report, our union stands upon a firm foundation of that nether rock of friendship, perfect trust, perfect faith, love stronger than death, which makes a peace in our hearts, a mighty influence in our lives which very truly "passeth understanding."

THE END.

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